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THE
LIGHTHOUSE.

A Novel.

BY
ELIZABETH HARCOURT MITCHELL,
AUTHORESS OF "FIRST FRUITS."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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Dedication.



TO

MY DEAR FATHER

THESE VOLUMES

ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

THE LIGHTHOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE is a lighthouse—no matter where. It was built—no matter when. It stands on a wild and rocky coast, and has been shaken by many a storm. It bears a red light, revolving at intervals of thirty-five seconds. Many a despairing heart has been cheered, and many a home-sick soul made joyous, as the little red speck appeared in the horizon, and told it that home was near, and the dangers of the voyage almost over. The crew of the great war-ship rejoiced as she passed within hail of the tower, labouring under her heavy canvas, and making a foaming way through the calm and mighty waters. They felt that now indeed their burning watch in the tropical regions was over ; that, for a time at least, they might rest in their homes, and revel in the delights of Old England ; and fathers, brothers, sons, greeted with eager eyes the first dawn of morning, which should prove to them the red light had spoken truly.

There was dancing and singing on board the merchant-vessel that sailed within sight of the

tower ; the sound of the hornpipe might be heard by the watchman who trimmed the light, for discipline is not so strictly kept as on board a queen's ship ; and the crew of the homeward-bound were free to rejoice even in the watches of the night. But these were not the only vessels the beacon protected and warned. The great West Indian steamers fizzed and panted as they passed, disturbing the silence of the night, like evil spirits envious of a calm they can only destroy for a moment, or like the troubles of life, which may indeed ruffle the temper for a short time, but eventually cannot hurt the deep peace of a strong mind, and when they were gone the track of white foam disappeared, the smoke cleared away, and the bright moon shone on the still, deep waters, asserting, as all Nature does, the supremacy of Heaven over earth, of God over man. But I have not spoken of the small fishing-boats that lay off and on that coast ; the fleets of trawlers with their tanned sails and heavy hulls ; the black, gloomy-looking coasting colliers, with their untidy canvas in shreds and patches ; and even on board the last-mentioned much-despised, though useful craft, the stirring strains of a fiddle might be faintly discerned by him who kept watch by that fiery lantern. I say "kept watch," for he literally did so. He was a melancholy man, aged, and made still more aged by sorrow. No sleep visited him by night, and but little by day. He seemed to live only for his lantern. No one ever visited him. No one knew his name ; and no one seemed to know exactly how

long he had been there. He was generally known amongst the fishermen and others as "John of the Lighthouse," and was nicknamed by them, "Jack-o'-Lantern." Once a week a boat with provisions put off from the mainland, and was moored to the steps of the lighthouse, but only for a few minutes, for the old man was always ready to receive them, and stood waiting at the door, looking like a statue, his white beard flowing in the wind, and his face expressing that even this short communication with his fellow-men was utterly distasteful to him. Let the weather be ever so wintry, the sea ever so wild, he never gave those who supplied him a moment's shelter, never invited them to rest beneath his roof, never uttered a word of thanks. Silently they came, silently they departed. As first those, whose duty it was to supply the old man with food, ventured to joke with him on his silence, and laughingly requested a pipe and a glass of rum, but the look which returned their jest made them quake at their own audacity, for there was that in his cold blue eyes which filled them with a supernatural horror. From this time he was regarded as a being from another world ; but many were the conjectures as to his history. Some said he was a magician, others that he had murdered his father, whilst a few gave vent to the more prosaic supposition that he had been born deaf and dumb. Great was the curiosity expressed as to the interior of his establishment, but no human being having crossed the threshold of the lighthouse during his away there, no information concerning it could be

obtained. There he lived, silently, watchfully, his eyes ever fixed on the vessels going or returning ; isolated from his fellow-beings ; above life, and yet below it ; above its affections, its hopes, its fears, its sympathies, and yet only half alive ; dead to the world, and yet a world to himself ; a fiery human soul in the midst of a waste of waters.

He might often be seen standing in the balcony at the top of the tower, watching the whales and the grampuses that played around his dwelling. He would listen to the screaming of the sea-gulls, and envy them as they chased one another into the far distance, and followed the flights of Mother Carey's chickens, as they in their turn pursued some outward-bound vessel, scaring the passengers on board with forebodings of coming evil. "Yes," he would often say to himself, "all things prey upon each other. The whales, the sharks, on lesser fish ; the lesser fish on the bones of shipwrecked men. The sea-gulls hunt for their prey ; the outward-bound ships go to conquer, to despoil, to cheat, and to traffic. The wild birds fight for their food ; men prey upon one another, and are in their turn preyed upon by the lower animals. All are fighting, hunting, working ; I only am silent, I only have no wish, no hope. Yet none desire my life, because I do not desire it myself—I am willing to give it up, therefore there is no one to take it." Thus would he muse, and thus were his quiet hours passed, when the winds were calm and the waves at rest, and the distant ships silently moving onwards. But it was far different in the

nights of tempest and darkness. Then indeed was his soul shaken as if it would leave the earthly home it seemed so ill-fitted for ; then sights and sounds of unutterable horror would surround him, and he would stand by his beloved lantern, uttering cries of anguish, until at last, overpowered with fatigue, and exhausted in body and mind, he would sink to a troubled and broken rest, as the storm gradually subsided. Alas ! only to awake to the oppressive sense of his misery. One or two sailors had often spoken to their comrades of the wonderful apparition they had seen on the lighthouse, of an old man, with streaming hair and beard, wildly tossing his arms to the storm ; but it was supposed to be one of those wonderful appearances sailors are peculiarly gifted with the faculty of seeing, and to be classed with the stories of mermen and mermaids ; for though some knew that a strange and lonely being dwelt on the rock, few imagined the sight in question to have any connexion with the lighthouse watcher.

Death strikes down the young, the joyous, the happy. He has no pity upon those who are surrounded by loving friends ; he has no sympathy for friendship ; he has no reverence for love. Hearts that beat with deep affection, souls that are shrines of goodness and purity, beings who form the centre of happy circles, are torn from all they love on earth, and leave a blank which no after happiness, no later friendships, can adequately fill. But there are some who seem to have no ties on earth, whose absence none would remark and

none regret, who wander over the plain of life like ghosts over a battle-field—hopeless, aimless, unloved, unloving. Why are they left? I know not. They wish for death, they sigh for death, they long for him. He comes not.

John of the Lighthouse was one of those who would gladly have greeted him, and yet years passed on, and he was still alive. He heard fearful sounds of shipwrecks, he heard guns of distress fired in the dark stormy winter nights, corpses floated by the lighthouse, and fishermen's wives would crowd the rocks belonging to the mainland, watching in agony as the roaring tide flung, sometimes a red cap, sometimes a sou'wester, and sometimes a human body on the shore, but all these things touched him not. Every now and then he missed one of the rowers of the boat that brought him food, but he asked not where he was gone. He tried to remember whether the missing one were young, whether he seemed loved and happy, and if his memory answered these questions in the affirmative, he concluded that he was dead, and that he had left many to grieve for him. If, on the contrary, his face was marked with care, if he seemed exhausted by rowing, if his hair was grey and his body wasted with toil, he said, "O no! he is still alive, unable to labour, but able to be a burden to himself and to others." I need not say that John's conclusions were often, indeed mostly, incorrect; but such is the tendency of the human mind, it is self-centred, and apt to judge the whole of mankind by its own immediate per-

sonal experience, which is as sensible as the attempt would be to measure with a foot-rule the distance from the earth to the moon.

Years passed on, and John was still alive. But the weariest way must have an end. One morning that the boat approached the lighthouse there was no one waiting on the steps to receive it.

"By the hole in my hat," said the steersman, "the old man is asleep for once."

"Don't be too sure," answered he who pulled the stroke-oar; "he'll come down before we can get within doors; trust him letting us see the inside of his pigeon hole, crafty old bird."

"I wonder what Jacky has done in his youth," said one of the rowers.

"Robbed a church and murdered the parson and clerk, I should think," was the reply. "At any rate it's something not to be spoken about, for he's as dumb as a tar-barrel, and yet as ready to flare up if you try to get a word out of him."

"Some say he had his tongue cut out in the Spanish war," suggested stroke.

"He couldn't eat and drink then, could he?" mildly expostulated the boy who pulled the bow-oar.

"Hold your tongue," replied his elder, "and don't teach your grandmother."

"To tell fibs," added the steersman.

This turned the laugh against stroke, and produced a fit of sulkiness on the part of the latter which lasted until they reached the steps, and was then immediately forgotten in the excitement of perceiving that no old man appeared.

"In, bow!" The order was obeyed, and the boat glided alongside the rock.

"Dash it," said one, "the old bird must have flown."

"How could he?" said another.

"Got on the back of a sea-gull, and flown away, I warrant you; wizards can do anything."

"They wouldn't fly far," said the boy; "the bird would drop into the sea to get a fish, and then the old man would jog off."

"Hold your jaw," was the polite rejoinder to the young one's second suggestion. "What had we best do, coxswain?"

"Why, go up and see what's become of him."

"Go up yourself! how would you like to be sent into a wizard's hole in that manner? Why I dare say the room would be full of blue flame. Ugh! I smell brimstone now!"

"It's only me lighting my pipe," said the boy.

"Oh, it's only you, is it? And what business have you to be lighting your pipe when I am talking, I should like to know?"

"About as much business as you've got to be talking whilst I'm lighting my pipe, I suppose," was the answer.

"Hang up that noise when you've done with it," requested the coxswain. "And now who's to go up and rouse old snuffy?"

"Not I"—"Not I"—Not I."

"I'd as lieve put my head in a lion's mouth," said the first.

"I'd rather take two dozen lashes," said the second.

"Well then, we must hollo. Lighthouse ahoy!" but the lighthouse was silent. "Lighthouse ahoy! I say, any one aboard? Lighthouse ahoy!" but not a soul answered. "It's mighty odd." And they began shouting again.

"Now then, old Squaretoes, here's your prog! Jack-o'-Lantern, where are you, my boy? Lighthouse ahoy!"

Nothing but a dead silence, except when the waves dashed upon the rock, and bumped the boat now and then gently against the stones.

"What's to be done now?"

"All go up together," was the proposition, unanimously agreed to.

"Moor the boat, then."

"Ay, ay," and out they jumped, carrying the basket with them, and hurried up the steps, singing to conceal the unpleasant feeling of awe which none of them could get rid of. The narrow staircase was soon mounted, which led to the old man's room. But the foremost of the party stopped suddenly as he entered it.

"Hold your noise," he said, turning towards the others; "here's something we've none of us reckoned on."

"What?" said his companions, as the song was stopped.

"Death!" answered the foremost. "Look there."

The apartment was furnished scantily. One chair and one table constituted all the furniture, with the exception of a narrow bed in one corner. A high, straight-backed chair, a common deal

table: and in the chair the old man was seated, white and stiff, papers, pen, and ink before him, his head resting on the table, and the ink hardly dry on the roll before him. The sun shone on his hoary head, as the rays streamed through the window. He seemed to have died as he had completed the manuscript. Here it is.

CHAPTER II.

THE MANUSCRIPT.

I HAVE had a warning. My strange and troubled life is drawing to an end. I am warned by the inner voice that speaks to every man's soul. I am commanded to write my history. Who will read it? I know not. Perhaps no one. It may be engulfed by the waves, or perish here in mouldy obscurity. My successor may light his pipe with the leaves, or it may be carried ashore by those who next come to my dwelling, and the history of the lonely old man may form the jest of the tavern and the diversion of hearts who have never known remorse. I care not. Silent for so many years, it is a relief to my burning soul to pour forth its shame and its sorrow.

I am the third son of a prosperous farmer. My early home was close to a rural inland village, in the midst of cornfields and green rich pasture lands. All around us spoke of peace and prosperity; we were very happy, and I look back to my young days as fallen Adam looked back to the Garden of Eden. How well I remember the old farmhouse, with its picturesque chimneys, half hidden in clustering ivy, its large wooden porch, black with age, and the quaint figures carved over

the door, telling of the days when it once formed the manorial residence of a powerful family.

I had two brothers and one sister. How shall I describe my brothers? There is not much to describe in them. Indeed, there is little to be said, except that they were like my father and mother, and that the characteristic of our family was good nature. I except myself, for I was the black sheep of the flock—always wanting what I could not have, always in mischief, never happy except when galloping my imagination to the West Indies, to the North Pole, to El Dorado, to anywhere in fact, or rather *out of fact*, for *matter of fact* was my great abhorrence. Indeed, I should have kept the house in a continual uproar, if our house could ever have so far forgotten its dignity as to be put in an uproar about anything; but if my father and mother had a fault it was an extreme horror of what they called “fuss.” There was an air of repose about everything they said and did; the only excitement occurred at the season of lambs, calves, and spring chickens, and even then it was in a particularly mild form. I, in my irreverence, called it sleepiness, dulness, want of energy; but I believe I should have been puzzled, even in my best days, to have got through half the day’s work of either. “Margaret, my dear,” my father would quietly say. “Well, Samuel,” answered my mother, calmly looking up from the tablecloth she was mending. “My best heifer’s dead.” “Oh, is it, dear?” would my mother still more calmly continue; “well, don’t

fuss yourself about it, dear ; nothing's worth worrying after." Fuss himself, indeed ; as if there was any danger of my father's fussing himself ! Miserable as I am now, the very idea makes me smile.

"Samuel, love," I fancy I can hear my mother saying, "the cheese press has fallen down and smashed the window." "Anybody hurt, dear?" would my father say. "O no ! nobody was in the room except the cat and her kitten, who had just been licking up all the cream, and they got out in the yard just in time luckily, poor little dears ; I knew *they* were all right, because I ran after them to prevent Betty giving them a knock with her broomstick for stealing the cream, which she is so apt to do ; she is such a violent temper, poor thing, though one oughtn't to blame her, for what could you expect with that mother of hers?" "Well, I'm glad it's no worse," her husband rejoined ; "don't fuss yourself, dear, and make a moan about it." "*I* make a moan about it, Samuel ? When did you ever know me make a moan about anything ?" And so they lived, dear old couple, making sunshine out of everything. Truly, contentment is the Philosopher's Stone.

There was a large garden belonging to the farm, a real old-fashioned garden, none of your trim modern lawns with little round and square beds cut out of them and filled with flowers, the names of which no person of ordinary comprehension can pronounce, much less understand ; but a good acre of ground, surrounded with high stone walls, and intersected by narrow walks. In this

garden grew every common thing and many uncommon things. We boasted the finest plums and cherries in the parish, but we were not less proud of our cabbages and rhubarb. There were no invidious distinctions made in *our* garden ; flowers and fruits and vegetables grew altogether, like members of one happy family, differing in talents and beauty and usefulness, but each necessary to the harmony of the whole. How delicious the large cabbage roses looked as they hung their heads in the early morning all sparkling with dew ; how lovely the grand white lilies. And then the stocks, and the wall-flowers, and sweet peas, and fragrant southernwood ; the very remembrance of the delight they used to give me brings gladness for a moment even to this melancholy dwelling.

Whoever had behaved best during the week had the privilege of picking my mother's Sunday nosegay. As may be imagined from the account I have given of myself, this occupation very seldom fell to my share. Indeed, it was almost considered the exclusive property of my little gentle fair-haired sister, Sophy. If ever there was an angel upon earth it was that child. She seemed a being of a different mould from my heavy, good-natured brothers. Her soft grey eyes had that peculiar expression one sometimes sees in those whose light is early destined to fade. I had often read of ministering angels—there was a great deal about them in the little books we gained for prizes at school—and I never could divest myself of the idea that Sophy was a ministering

angel. I never saw her very merry, and yet she was never depressed. There was something almost awful in the constant calm of her spirit ; and when she sat in the sunset time watching the soft blue hilly outline in the distance, an unearthly radiance seemed shed upon her head, her golden hair shone as it caught the beams of the setting sun, and I used to gaze upon her with awe, sometimes fancying her the Fairy Queen, sometimes one of those child-martyrs we read of as belonging to the first centuries of Christianity. I remember one evening, as we were all sitting together in happy idleness after the day's tasks, Sophy turned to us, and said in her quiet manner—

“ I wonder what the sky is made of ? ”

“ Blue satin, of course, Sophy,” said matter-of-fact Tom.

I felt so provoked with him I could have knocked him off the stile where he sat. I then proceeded to explain to Sophy (for I thought myself vastly wise, having obtained a little smattering of knowledge concerning heat and cold, the barometer, the thermometer, &c.,) what air was, and I have no doubt a most unintelligible explanation it was.

“ As if anybody could understand such nonsense as that,” interrupted Alfred, half amused, half provoked at my earnestness in what he considered a matter of very small importance. “ I really do think, Jack, you grow more ridiculous every day, and if I were—— ”

What Alfred was going to say was lost to the

world, for he was struck off the stile by a large lump of couch grass and mud which I aimed at his shoulder, and sent spinning down the steep bank into the ploughed field beneath it.

"Oh, how could you?" was Sophy's gentle exclamation; but Tom gave vent to a loud laugh, and ran to help his brother up. Now there is nothing I should have enjoyed at the moment so much as a good stand-up fight, but I never could get my brothers to quarrel; what I said in earnest they took in jest; indeed they seemed to make a joke of everything. And even I, who seldom laughed, could not help joining in the general merriment as Alfred toiled up the bank, wiping the mud off his great fat rosy face, and making grimaces at me.

"What did you go for to do that for?" said he; "if the rector had seen you, wouldn't you catch it, that's all!"

"I don't care for you or the rector either," replied I, relapsing into my fit of sulkiness; "no, nor for the clerk, or the schoolmaster, to say nothing of the sexton, and the whole lot of them."

"Don't care came to be hanged," said Tom, in a sepulchral voice, "and that's what you'll come to, Jacky."

"Much more like to be drowned," muttered I.

"But come now," said Sophy, "no one has answered my question. What has gas to do with the sky, and what makes the sky blue?"

"Distance makes the sky blue."

"Distance, who's he?" asked Alfred, with the

most aggravating gravity; "any relation to the party who made my forehead blue the day before yesterday?" pointing to a bruise I had given him in one of my violent humours.

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt Sophy and me so, Alfred. The air seems all pressed together when it's very far off, and then it becomes blue, and then it's called sky."

"Well, I can't understand you," said Sophy; "but never mind, it wont be very long before I know all about it."

I have often thought of this little sentence since; and even then I had a very unpleasant and mysterious sensation as it fell upon my ear. What could she mean by it? "It wont be very long before I know all about it." Was she going to study, then, and find out for herself what I could not tell her? Pshaw! the idea was too absurd. Sophy hated the sight of a book; it was of no use trying to teach her, for she would never learn anything. Sometimes I would say to her, "Now do listen, Sophy, and let me read this to you;" and her answer would be, "Oh, don't read it, John, tell it me, for I can't listen to those book words." Ignorant as she was, we all felt that she knew something we did not know; indeed I once ventured to hint to my brothers that I was certain she could communicate with the unseen world, and that angels visited her, but the idea was greeted with such shouts of laughter that I vowed from that moment nothing should ever again induce me to make either of them my confidant upon any subject more spiritual than bacon

or cheese. However, the unpleasant feeling I had with regard to Sophy's remark soon vanished under the influence of the bright evening and our merry party, and we were amicably seated all together, revelling in the adventures of Bevis of Southampton, which I recounted to my admiring auditors, and which nothing would ever make them believe I had not invented myself, for they had (however they might pretend the contrary) a great opinion of my abilities, and constantly asserted that "nobody but Jacky could do anything so clever," when my mother called us to supper.

What happy days those were! At least, so I think, now that they have passed away, and yet I remember I was not really very happy then. If this history should be read, wonder will doubtless be felt at the minute manner in which I have been able to describe scenes that happened so long ago, but if the reader be a thoughtful man, or if he have known much sorrow, I do not think he will wonder long. The imagination, the memory, the heart of a child, are not crowded with a multiplicity of events; every circumstance is impressed clearly and vividly upon his unoccupied mind, and each has its due share of importance. In after life it is not so. What would have cut deeply into our hearts and memories in the days of our youth, makes but a slight scratch in after years: the deep cuts remain whilst the slight scratches are rendered obscure and confused by others still slighter, and thus we go on till the whole is effaced by death. How vivid our recol-

lections of childhood are ! Has not every one some point to which he can look back as the beginning of his mental awakening ? The first rattle, the first spelling-book, or, misery of miseries, the first punishment ! The first time we were out nutting *by ourselves* is indelibly impressed upon our minds, the sense of freedom, the delight of getting into mischief, the glory of wading brooks, and coming home with wet feet and torn clothes, the fright at passing the bull in the church field, which bull always went amongst the children of the parish by the name of "the mad bull." Why, I never could understand, inasmuch as he was perfectly harmless and had never been known to attack any one ; indeed, I believe he was too fat to do so, even if he had been so inclined. But I remember it was considered a great exploit to pass close to him ; and if one of us ventured to do so, decorated with a red worsted comforter or a scarlet handkerchief, that one was immediately dubbed a hero amongst the juveniles, and looked upon with as much respect as we in our maturer years should bestow upon Leonidas or Horatius Cocles, if they could suddenly appear before us. I remember all this, and the feelings of intense delight, almost of delirious joy, with which I perpetrated any piece of mischief that was likely to be particularly disagreeable or hurtful to any one else ; and yet these feelings soon passed away, and left me what I really was—a moping, melancholy boy. I did not often join in the games of my brothers ; their tastes did not suit me. They were always playing at cattle-

shows or ploughing-matches, and I hated everything concerning farming, probably because I knew that to be a farmer was marked out as my future lot in life. How often have I sat under the old walnut-tree with "Robinson Crusoe," watching what I considered their ridiculous and childish amusements, and even now I can hardly help smiling when I remember one or two of their favourite games. Sometimes they would get a deal board, and one end was fastened to a long rope which was secured to Alfred's waist, who then represented a cart-horse drawing a plough; at the other end of it was stationed Tom, who, holding it very high up, gravely pushed one of the corners along a soft, muddy piece of ground to make a furrow. This was the ploughing-match; and kind, obliging Sophy, who was always deeply interested in these important proceedings, acted the part of umpire, and, as there were no competitors, all the imaginary prizes fell of course to my brothers. Another game they were very fond of was driving fat pigs home from market; Alfred, nothing loth, was generally requested to perform the part of pig—a part for which I, in my brotherly affection, would pronounce him admirably fitted by nature—and the orchard walls have rung for many a sunny afternoon with shouts of laughter produced by his swinish antics, whilst Tom and Sophy took it by turns to enact the "old woman."

"Come and play with us, Jacky," they would say, "and you shall be whatever you like, if you wont mope so."

"Play at battles, then," said I, "and I will be Scipio, and Tom shall be Hannibal, and Sophy shall be the Roman army, and Alfred shall be the Carthaginian army."

"O no!" was generally the answer; "the names are too hard. Besides, we should have to fight, and we all hate fighting, don't we?"

"I should *just* think so," would the others re-join; "what's the use of it, I should like to know? No, no, let's have a vestry meeting in the church porch, and I'll be my father, and make a speech, and you shall be all the other farmers, and Sophy shall be the squire, and Alfred shall be the rector."

"Not half amusing enough," was my reply; "let us three be pirates, and hang Alfred on an apple-tree."

This plan was hailed with enthusiasm by all excepting Alfred, who decidedly objected to being hanged. He said he did not see why *he* should be hanged any more than anybody else; that we had much better hang Tom. Tom said we were perfectly welcome to do so if we could catch him, and immediately set off running down the primrose covered bank at such a rate that we watched him with breathless astonishment, thinking certainly that he would be into the brook below it, but he stopped short with a jerk, and threw himself on his back beside it, flinging his cap at us with gestures of derision. I, being the proposer of the game, and, moreover, captain of the pirates, considered myself exempt from all idea of undergoing suspension, and now I appealed to Sophy.

But Sophy was obstinate. In vain I implored her for my sake to consent to be hanged ; in vain I promised to cut her down before life should be extinct, and to convey her in my cloak (a horse-cloth) to an imaginary river (the brook), where a boat was waiting for us (a washtub I had stolen for the purpose), which would safely convey us to my cave in the mountains (situated behind the broken down cheese-press in the scullery) ; but not even the prospect of this romantic adventure could soften the obdurate Sophy, and with a merry laugh she ran away to get the tea ready, telling me if I wanted to hang anybody to go and hang myself, and she would promise not to cut *me* down. All prospect of the game was now over, as Alfred had walked off to join Tom, rather in airs, and muttering, " Bother ! how tiresome Jack is ! always spoiling our play with his nonsense ! " Thus it generally ended whenever I attempted to join in their amusements, they not understanding my ideas, I despising theirs, and at last we left off being much together in our play hours except when I was wanted to tell them a story, of which I had always a large stock, my reading partaking much more of the amusing and marvellous than of the instructive element. Myschool work was generally in arrear, but I could have passed a very minute examination in " Don Quixote," " Robinson Crusoe," and any book I could procure which gave accounts of stirring adventures, or murderous and horrible piratical expeditions. I was also very fond of the " Pilgrim's Progress," not for the deep

spiritual wisdom contained in it, for I never at that time felt, or affected to feel, religious, but for the fights related in it, and for the excitement and adventure of the story. Also the romantic parts of ancient history had peculiar charms for me. I revelled in the stories of Curtius and Regulus, and wished from the bottom of my heart I had lived in those times, that I might have done the same. Should I have done the same if I *had* lived in those times? I thought so then, but now I much doubt it, and the reason I doubt it is, because I remember I was always thinking of self, and that is not the way to be a hero. When I read of a noble action, instead of simply admiring it, I always wondered what *I* should have done in similar circumstances, and I generally concluded I should have been equally heroic, equally self-sacrificing. How many of the aspirations and longings of our youth have their origin in a morbid and insufferable vanity! How often do we wish to follow in the steps of the ancients, not for the sake of their virtue, but for the sake of their fame! and how utterly opposed is this vanity to the spirit of true heroism which, ever quiet and unobtrusive, often prepares itself by a whole lifetime of discipline and self-denial for the final great deed that is to be written in the records of posterity; and yet perchance even this deed cost less effort than a thousand actions which no doubt preceded it, and yet were never heard of. These thoughts crowd vividly into my mind; and I, who have to answer for a wasted life, may surely be pardoned if now,

in my solitary hours, I record them to serve as a warning to the restless, if any such chance to read them. At the time, however, of which I write, I was very little troubled by moralizing ideas. I had the same sleeping-room as my brothers, and when the candle was put out, I would, at their request, generally begin some long rambling narration which lasted until they or I dropped off to sleep. In this way we went through many of the books I had been reading, and when Tom or Alfred had affronted me in the course of the day, I would punish them by refusing to continue the story. It was difficult, at least it would have been with most people, to be affronted with my most good-humoured brothers, but I was of such an irritable temperament that it was with the greatest difficulty I could pass through the events of the day, without giving vent to a violent passion, which considerably disturbed the equanimity of the quiet farmer's household ; and even endearments had the same effect upon me sometimes as stroking a cat backwards has upon the temper of that suspicious, and (to me) remarkably unpleasant quadruped. In one or two of my sulky fits I refused to eat my dinner, but to my great exasperation nobody seemed to remark whether I ate or not, and after a little consideration I decided that it was hardly worth while to put myself to such an inconvenience, as it only seemed to annoy myself and nobody else ; so I gave up that amusement and set my wits to work in order to invent some new method of tormenting the peaceable inhabitants of the farm.

All this is horrible to write of, and horrible to think of, but now that I look back calmly upon the events of my childhood I am certain my proceedings had nothing whatever to do with malevolence. Excitement was my sole object ; I hated quiet, I detested humdrum, everyday life, I wanted to find out a new range of ideas, of feelings ; I envied the birds because they could fly to other climes, I envied the fishes because they must know, I thought, what was under the waters, I wished to be anywhere but at the farm, I wished to be any one but myself. I used to go and sit in the churchyard and wish for death, not because I thought of heaven, or that I imagined myself fit for it (ignorant as I was of religious topics, I knew better than that,) but merely out of curiosity ; I wanted to pry into the unseen world, I thought nothing too high for me, nothing too deep ; my soul seemed on fire, a fire that could not be quenched even with tears, for many a night has my pillow been drenched with them as I lay in sleepless agony wondering where I should go when I died, wondering how ever I came into the world, and speculating upon subjects supposed to be far removed from the thoughts of childhood.

How little is known of the struggles and sufferings of children ; they are supposed to be happy and contented all day, and as long as they have plenty of sleep and food and play, their wild bursts of passion, their strange wilfulness and sullenness, are all placed to the account of bad temper or (which is nearly the same thing) to the

agency of the Evil One; but I cannot help thinking it is the conflict of the soul when it first wakes to the sense of its imprisonment; it is the immortal part struggling with the mortal; it feels dissatisfied with its present lot; it knows it was meant for something higher, and it cannot yet understand why it should be bound down to what it feels so distasteful. Happy, thrice happy, is he who finds out early what is the true resting-place of the soul; and miserable, thrice miserable, is he who neglects to learn, or who, having learnt, spends his best years in following his own wayward caprices. I might have learnt, but I did not heed. From want of steadfastness of mind I had not the power of fixing my attention when it was needed; my wits were always wandering to the remotest parts of the globe at the time my mother instructed us in the simple truths of our religion, and I had no taste for the good rector's sermons. To go to church was to me a penance. I had a tolerably correct ear for music, and it nearly drove me mad to hear the terrible howling our village musicians mistook for singing; and one particular bass voice excited my wrath and indignation to such a degree that I am sure, if I had been a man at that time, it would not have been safe for him to have met me alone in one of the narrow lanes near our village. I felt wicked whenever I heard that bass voice, with its long nasal drawl. I tried to check the feelings of disgust with which it inspired me, but it was of no use. I never could overcome my deep aversion towards

it, and always considered its deep infliction on the congregation as a personal injury to myself. Then there was another thing that always distracted my attention in church ; a hideous monument which grew upon the wall opposite our pew ; I could not keep my eyes off this antiquated specimen of village art for long together ; I hated it, and so I felt myself obliged to look at it. Even to this day that monument is clearly before my eyes, I remember every cut in the stone, every letter of the uninteresting inscription. It was, or rather is (for I have no doubt it still remains in the place it occupied during my boyhood, as ugly things generally remain intact and uninjured, whilst nobler and fairer works are soon destroyed by time or mischief), a round thick slab of grey stone, and the inscription ran thus :—

Sacred to the memory of Thomas Dee,
Who died September 15, 1671, aged 62.
My name (as was) is Thomas Dee,
I left my wife and children three,
But little time he gives to we,
Therefore prepare to follow me.

I used to read this jingling verse over and over again, and puzzle my brains with speculations as to who it could be who was mentioned as giving so "little time" to "we," and then my fancy would run off to the wife and children three, and I would wonder what sort of persons they might be, and whether Mrs. Dee had blue eyes or brown, and whether she lived long after her husband, and where she died, and where she was buried, and

whether the young Dees were sons or daughters, and if they were sons, whether they went to the same school as my brothers and I did, and if they were daughters, whether they were like Sophy, but this I always decided in the negative, no one *could* be like Sophy. When I had exhausted every kind of speculation concerning the respectable family of Dee, I would (though I hated arithmetic when I was made to do it in school) count all the words in the inscription, then all the letters in each word, then all three up together, and mark the sum-total in the cover of my Prayer Book. This sum-total always came different every Sunday, and this difference added to the excitement of my occupation.

If any deem this picture overdrawn, watch any child with an active mind and little to exercise it upon—any child, I mean, who is not blest with a sufficient portion of veneration to counteract its irreverent curiosity and morbid restlessness—and I am sure you will be able to trace feelings kindred to those I have described. An energy which, rejecting the work prescribed for it, seeks for employment elsewhere, a mind that insists upon choosing its own food, and plays with surrounding things and circumstances, like an evil spirit or a mischievous fairy, a continual craving for something new, a strong sense of the ludicrous, and a love of the grotesque, these are the characteristics of many, who, under proper discipline, have toned down and become useful and estimable workers in the rough fields of life, and also of many, who, like

me, have given way to every fancy as it rose, and been a torment to themselves and to all whom they might have benefited. However, to some of the holy histories I listened with attention. Such stories as the fall of Jericho, the slaughter of the priests of Baal, the murder of Naboth, and the death of the seven kings, always interested me. I would listen to them with breathless attention, but I did not care to investigate the right or wrong of the question; provided it was a scene of bloodshed and adventure, I took little account of the lesson it conveyed. Everything that was holy, gentle, peaceful, and soothing had no effect upon me: I cared as little for the calm doctrines and gentle teachings of the New Testament as I did for the solemn beauty of the church, as it stood with its white tower peeping out of the surrounding trees; certainly I loved being alone in the churchyard, but it was more on account of the solitude there enjoyed, and of the mysterious awe which every one who *thinks* must feel in the resting-place of former generations, than from any due appreciation of the lovely scenery. To me it seemed tame: I despised the deep green woods, the shady lanes, the smiling pastures, the whitewashed cottages, and longed for the countries I had read of, rocks and dashing seas, cascades and mountains, strange wild solitudes, and unfathomable forests, or if those could not be had, I would be content with burning sands and arid skies, with palm trees and camels. "Look how white the pear-trees are," would little Sophy say; "are they not glorious?"

"Yes," I would answer, "pretty well, but not half so beautiful as the red passion flowers that grow in the South American woods and hang trailing down to the rivers." Sophy did not see the connexion of ideas, and would disturb my romantic flow of thought by innocently asking whether passion flowers grow upon pear-trees in America, and on receiving a pettish reply in the negative, would advise me, as I could not see the passion flowers I so much admired, to admire the pear-trees I *could* see, a hint which produced one of my frequent fits of sulkiness. Not that I ever was really angry with Sophy, I loved her too well. I liked my brothers, but I adored my sister; most likely because she was so different from myself. There is a strange fascination in a character entirely opposite to our own: the gay are generally attracted by the quiet, the cheerful by the melancholy, the romantic by the sensible, and the enthusiastic by those whose maturer judgment can sober down their wild fancies. We seem always unconsciously to be seeking in others for that which can supply the deficiencies in ourselves. This was the secret of the influence Sophy possessed over me. Her quiet good sense often made me feel how absurd I was. Would that she had lived! How different my fate might then have been! I used often to feel provoked with her when, instead of sitting with me under the yew-tree in the churchyard, or leaning over the parapet of the bridge to listen to the murmur of the quiet river below, she insisted upon

returning to the house to help my mother in some domestic affairs, or declared that it was time to "leave off sitting in the damp, as the fog was rising, and we should both catch our deaths of cold." "I never think about cold when I'm with you, Sophy, but you don't care for me half as much as I do for you." "I care for you too much to let you catch an ague," would she answer; "besides, we've got to work for our living, and must learn not to waste our time in this manner." Of course I was again affronted at the idea of conversation with me being called "waste of time," but it was of no use being affronted with Sophy, for she never would see it. I thought it very tiresome of Sophy *not* to see it, and hit upon an expedient to make her jealous. I began diligently to seek the society of Mary Alton, a little girl who lived at the next farm, and who was ready enough to waste time in many wild excursions. She was rather like me, very passionate, and hated doing what she was told. I remember as if it were yesterday the first time I ever saw her.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

THE farm of Little Dale was a pleasant nook situated in one of the most sheltered parts of the warm, home-looking country. A steep grassy declivity led from the door of the farmhouse down to a brook which dashed along over large loose stones, and made such a pleasant noise, I used to sit for hours on the crooked plank that formed the bridge leading into the church path, to listen. It was a fine hot summer day, and moreover a half-holiday ; I had insulted my brothers, and quarrelled with Sophy, and was lying on a green bank, contemplating the brook, and trying to get rid of the feelings of remorse which insisted upon obtruding themselves upon my mind. Directly I had done anything wrong, I was always very sorry for it, but instead of immediately repairing the mischief, and resolving to do so no more, I would spend hours and even days in brooding over and regretting my conduct, thereby making myself ten times more disagreeable and sulky than before. However, the fineness of the afternoon, and the singing of the birds, made me ashamed of my melancholy, and taking out a penknife, I soon began cutting away at a cork I had in my pocket,

violently endeavouring to transform it into a boat. This occupation lasted until I had sliced off a piece of my thumb, and broken the blade of my penknife, when I was startled by a terrific scream which came from the direction of the farmhouse garden above me. Our former neighbours at Little Dale had gone away to a distant part of the county, and my father and mother had not yet made acquaintance with the new-comers. We young ones, with the curiosity natural to our childhood, were longing to know what kind of people they could be, and were anticipating anxiously the following Sunday, when we should be sure to see them in church.

I listened. Another scream, longer and louder than the first, followed. What could it be? Somebody was evidently trying to kill somebody else, and it was certainly my duty, so I thought, to step between them and prevent further mischief. I did not stay to consider the very small chance I had against an antagonist of superior size and strength, indeed I rather gloried in the anticipation of a scuffle, and curiosity, love of excitement, and also a propensity to meddle, all prompted me to interfere. Throwing the penknife into the brook, and the half-finished boat after it, I rushed across the plank and bounded up the hill, jumped over the stile that separated the garden from the field, and running up the garden walk (guided by the screams that proceeded from the end of it), soon found myself face to face with the object of my solicitude. A pretty little girl, with flaxen ringlets

and delicate features, was stamping and raging in the walk, and heaping torrents of abuse upon some invisible offender. "What's the matter?" I exclaimed, running up to her; "is there anything I can do for you?"

"Oh, *you're* coming to torment me now, are you?" was the answer; "get away, do, or I'll kill you;" and taking up a small garden-rake that lay by her side, she flung it at my head. I dodged it, and it struck against the top of the garden wall, bringing down a shower of broken glass. I had no idea a little girl could be so strong, even in a passion, and this exhibition of muscular force rather excited my admiration than anger.

"Oh, how could you do such a thing," I mildly remonstrated; "do you know you might have been the death of me?"

"I wish I had, I only wish I had, oh! oh! oh!" (screaming violently,) "the bees have been nearly killing me, and I should like to kill everybody, oh! oh! oh!" and again the screams became terrific. I was puzzled what to do; nobody seemed to attend to her, or the outcry she made. It was of no use to stay and try and make friends with her, for the state of passion she was in rendered all overtures utterly useless. I resolved therefore to knock at the back door and call for assistance. I knocked and called, but for some time in vain. At last I summoned courage to open the door gently, and try to discover whether the house were empty or the inmates too busy to attend to my cries. A strong and delicious smell of baking

came from the back kitchen, but before I had time to make any further observations, a strong, portly, stern-faced dame with arms all covered with flour, made her appearance, and walking straight up to me, exclaimed in most discouraging tones, "Now then, you lazy boy! what do you want, coming and disturbing your neighbours when they're busy, and kicking up such a scrimmage at the back door, and letting in the fowls, and hindering me when I'm baking, and spoiling more flour than you're worth, and more time than you ever made use of in your life?"

I was so astonished at this rapid address, that for some moments I could not reply.

"Now then," continued the angry dame, "why don't you speak? what have you got to say for yourself? Look sharp—bless my heart——" and she seized a broomstick which lay near, and flourished it in a menacing manner.

"I—I—I—I came to—to—to—to——" stammered I, now quite divested of my heroic mood.

"Well, to—to—to—to—what? Don't stand stuttering there, but speak, if you've got a tongue in your head, or if you've got anything to say; and if you *haven't* got anything to say, move off as fast as you can."

"Well then, I heard screams in the garden, and thought somebody was being robbed and murdered, so I ran to see, and when I got there I found a little girl stamping amongst the beehives and stung all over. Hark! there she is, roaring still."

"Oh, is that all?" replied my formidable ques-

tioner ; "I'll soon settle that. Has she knocked any of the beehives over ?"

"O no ! I think not, but she seems dreadfully hurt."

"Serve her right, I'm very glad of it," answered the hard-hearted mother. "I told her not to go near them, but of course that was the reason she did. Come along with me, and *I'll* teach you how to treat refractory children." And she tramped along the garden walk, I following her and trembling at the consequences of my well-meant interference. Mary still stood where I had left her, and continued to indulge in the violent exertion of voice which had so alarmed me, but which did not seem to produce any effect upon her mother besides that of extreme anger. "Who do you think is to put up with *your* noise ?" asked the latter, seizing her screaming daughter by the shoulder and giving her a vigorous shake.—"Oh, oh ! oh ! you'll break my back, you'll kill me ; look, I'm stung to death, and now you're going to end me altogether ;" and then ensued a violent scene of kicking and struggling on the part of my little friend. I had sense enough to see that this was half pretence on the part of Mary, and that she was not nearly as much hurt as she imagined either by the bees or by her mother. However, I was too much interested in the affair to move until it was concluded, and it ended in Mary's being carried off and shut up in the hayloft until good behaviour, whilst her mother returned to the baking. I would willingly have lingered about



the premises for a chance of another glimpse of the strange little being who at that moment fascinated my imagination, but there was not the slightest hope of seeing her, and I could only make out her whereabouts by the outcry she still vigorously kept up. I knew there was no chance of her release just yet, as from the similarity of our dispositions I was quite aware that a considerable time must elapse before the delinquent would make any attempt at an apology, and I had no reason, from the scene I had witnessed, to imagine that her mother was as forbearing as mine would have been under similar circumstances, so I proceeded slowly home, pondering over this little incident in my monotonous life, and resolving, if I had an opportunity, to cultivate an acquaintance begun under such curious and exciting circumstances. I promised myself much pleasure from associating with a disposition so utterly unlike the calm temperaments I had been accustomed to ; I perceived I had got into a hornet's nest, but I had not the slightest wish to get out, even though I might chance to be severely stung for my temerity. I amused myself by wondering if Mary would like to walk with me and listen to the strange long stories I could tell her, whether she would be afraid of the damp when I wanted her to sit on the bridge, whether she would throw a rake at my head next time I ventured to speak to her ; in fact, I could not get that passionate little face with the flaxen ringlets out of my head. I dreamt of her continually, but it was several days before I

saw her again. At last the happy moment arrived. One evening I was returning home from school (my brothers and I attended a day school in a town about two miles distant from the farm, where we learnt a little Latin and a great deal of mischief) when I heard a voice singing loudly and clearly a harvest-home song, and on approaching the spot whence the sounds proceeded, I saw the subject of my thoughts sitting on a stile with her eyes fixed on the deep green wood opposite. "Ahem!" said I, trying to think of something to begin the conversation with, and considering it right in the first place to give notice of my approach. No answer or movement.

"Fine evening, miss!" I continued, in my blandest tones. No answer.

"How do you do, Miss Mary?" was the next sentence I managed to put together. Still no answer.

"A long time since I saw you last, when the bees stung you. Don't you remember?" Not a word could I obtain. I had never met with anything like this before. It reminded me strongly of my own sulky fits with Sophy, when in her coaxing manner she would in vain try to restore me to good humour, and I would pretend to be even more disagreeable than I really felt, in order to be coaxed still more. At last I thought of an expedient to attract her attention. There was a small pond by the roadside, and two or three ducks were complacently swimming on it. I threw a stone into the water. This roused her, and she



turned sharply round, startled by the splash. Her eyes were fixed upon me, so I took advantage of the circumstance to aim a stone at the head of one of the ducks. Fortunately it missed the mark, but created a consternation amongst the divers, and a loud quacking broke the silence. Still Mary made no remark, and I took up another and was going to repeat the action, when she suddenly ran up to me, and exclaimed, in her passionate manner, "You naughty wicked boy, how dare you do such a disgraceful thing?"

Here was a triumph; I had made her speak at last.

"I only did it because you would not speak to me or look at me."

"And why should I when you went and told my mother of me, and got me shut up in the hay-loft?" she answered.

"Oh, how could you think I did it on purpose? I was only so frightened at hearing you scream so, I did not know what to do; besides, your mother must have heard you anyhow, you made such a noise. How are your stings?"

"Oh, pretty well, no thanks to you," was the polite reply.

"Will you come and walk a little way with me?" I asked, in as insinuating a tone as I could command. It is very odd, I never lost my temper as quickly with hot-tempered people as I did with those of a calm disposition; they never provoked me half as much.

"No, I must go home, or else I shall be shut

up again if I am late for supper. Good night." And over the stile she sprang, and ran across the field in the direction of Little Dale.

Now, very likely if she had done as I wished, I should not have looked forward to meeting her again with half the pleasure that I now did. There was something mysterious about her that I longed to fathom, and when I went home I could do nothing but talk to Sophy about her. Sophy did not like the account I gave of her, and thought she must be very disagreeable, but I did not give much heed to her opinion, as I imagined (and partly hoped) it might have proceeded from a feeling of jealousy. Poor Sophy! I have often wondered what could make her care for such a wayward disposition, and till she died I never knew how much I loved her. I puzzled her much by my strange vagaries, but I never puzzled any one as much as I did myself. I was a riddle to myself, I could not understand myself, I could not *find myself out*. I used to speculate upon the cause of my being so unlike the other members of my family, and at last I decided that I inherited my discontented and wandering propensities from a certain great-uncle, whose memory was enveloped in a cloud. The history of this relation I vainly endeavoured to discover. Nobody seemed to know anything about him, further than that he was a very naughty boy, famous for robbing orchards, and getting into all kinds of scrapes, and the pest of all the neighbouring farmers. He was sent to school, but could not be kept there, and at last he

ran away to sea. What became of him afterwards was a mystery; some said he had become the captain of a slaver, and was murdered in an insurrection of the poor creatures he was conveying into bondage; others, that he had turned pirate, and had been hanged at Buenos Ayres; but there was no clue to his certain fate, and one conjecture might have been as near the truth as another for anything his relations could tell to the contrary. There was some vague tradition concerning a visit he paid to the village after one of his voyages, and this visit must have taken place, for undoubted relics of it were left behind. There was a collection of rubbish in one of the garrets in the farmhouse, that could have belonged to no one else. Two or three old pipes, a pistol with the lock broken, and some worm-eaten books.

I was very fond in wet weather of examining these treasures, and often and often explored the old attic in hopes of finding some more. Amongst them was a Spanish grammar, and to my unspeakable joy I at length discovered the companion dictionary, which lay with its brown cover half torn off at the bottom of a heap of rubbish. I hated learning at school, I hated learning at home, I disliked everything which I ought to know, but here was something which nobody had ever told me to learn, which I should not be praised for knowing or scolded for not knowing, and so I immediately began to try and know it. There was something too about the old books which fascinated me. I fancied they could tell me some-

thing of my mysterious uncle, and I pondered long over the strange scribblings and nautical calculations with which the blank leaves in them were covered. I made rapid progress in my studies, for the secrecy with which I conducted them gave a tenacity to my memory, and as I had little time to devote to them I was careful to employ that time diligently. How would the old schoolmaster have opened his eyes if he could have seen the boy who never would apply to anything at school for long together, now poring in the dusky twilight over the battered old grammar and expending upon it more than twice the application that would have made him dux of the school. I know not whether he would have wondered most at the diligence which overcame difficulties in secret, or at the obstinacy which refused to seek eminence in the beaten track. I am quite sure of one fact, there was nothing the least praiseworthy in my application. It was prompted by no higher motive than curiosity, and no higher aim than that of self-gratification. I was too young to know or appreciate the value of an acquaintance with that or any other language; I was inquisitive, I felt I must learn something, must have some employment for my intellect; and as I would not take any pleasure in my set tasks, I sought it in this in the same manner that many other ingenious children would have occupied themselves with a Chinese puzzle or an arithmetical problem. I often questioned my father concerning this mysterious uncle, but his answers were always short

and unsatisfactory. "The less you know of him the better, boy," he used to say; "he's no credit to us. I only hope you won't turn out like him, one vagabond is enough in a family." "But, father," I would expostulate, "he was a clever man, wasn't he, and went over half the world?" "And much good it did him," said the old farmer, blowing a cloud from his long pipe; "better have stayed at home and learnt how to plough a straight furrow, and he might have been alive now and as fat as I am." This seemed to be the highest point of my father's ambition, that everybody might be as fat as he was. I inwardly hoped I never might realize his expectations—but it would not have been polite to express my opinion aloud. However, nothing could alter my conviction that my deceased uncle, being the only scamp, was likewise the only great man of the family, and I secretly determined I would follow his footsteps so far as they led, short of any actual villany or daring crime. What dreams I had over that old cap and broken pistol! I pictured to myself all the adventures he went through, I followed him in imagination to all kinds of strange countries. I wished I had lived in the same generation, that I might have been his brother and joined his scapegrace expeditions. I thought of him as of another Columbus, another Sir Walter Raleigh, and I felt convinced that he would have understood and appreciated all my nameless sorrows, all my unattainable desires, and given me the sympathy I was always longing for and could never obtain. I even envied him his

grave in the great deep. I thought it much finer to be buried there under the rolling waves, than laid peacefully to rest in our little green church-yard, for I had made a little history of my own concerning his end in which I omitted all mention of the malefactor's fate assigned to him by village tradition, and gave him a glorious burial-place in the majestic Atlantic Ocean. I sometimes indulged a wild dream that he might still be alive and that I might meet him in some of the wanderings I had planned to take when I grew a man, but this showed the usual aberration of intellect which assailed me whenever I attempted to make anything like a calculation, for if this event had ever happened my uncle would then have been about one hundred years of age.

CHAPTER IV.

A FIGHT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

AT last a circumstance occurred which made Mary Alton take pleasure in my society. I had sought her several times since my first rebuff, but without success. I met her now and then on my way to and from school, but she never would speak to me or take any notice of me. We had also opportunities of conversing whilst our mothers exchanged words outside the church after service, but she never would allow me to take advantage of them. She kept her eyes resolutely fixed on the nearest gravestone and pretended not to see any of us. My brothers made no advances towards her, and pronounced her a disagreeable, unsociable little oddity, whom it was not worth while to try and conciliate, but Sophy in her engaging manner would always make a point of saying something pleasant, and though her irresistible sweetness could not obtain more than a passing smile from the wayward child, still that was more than either of us could gain. I puzzled myself with conjecturing the cause of her behaviour. Was it in consequence of my unlucky interference? It was hardly possible that a child of that age should harbour resentment for so long a time. I never did, and

therefore I imagined *she* would not. Yet what other reason could it be? It was of no use to think about it, I could never get nearer the truth. I must try and find out. I used to ask my mother to send me with messages to the farm, in hopes of meeting Mary, but I never could get a word with her. Mrs. Alton was very good-natured when she was not too busy, but a great deal to do always produced in her a kind of nervous irritation extremely unpleasant to behold. Though I was often a witness to occasional outbreaks, I very seldom came in for such a violent scene as that I participated in on the first day of our acquaintance, and when there *was* an outcry, I generally perceived that my silent charmer was in fault. I was particularly fond of animals, and lavished upon one or two pets a passionate attachment which might have been much better expended. I never could bear to see anything beaten or ill-used. I carried this sensitiveness to a morbid extreme, so much so, that sometimes I hardly dared pick a flower for fear of hearing it squeak. It may be wondered that I, who showed so little tenderness for the feelings of those I loved, should possess this sensibility with regard to animals and even inanimate objects; but so it is. Human nature is made up of inconsistency; I do not believe that a thoroughly consistent man or woman ever lived or ever will live upon this earth. One day I was walking leisurely along the road, returning home from school, and thinking over with no very pleasurable feelings the severe amount of flogging

and reprimanding I had received in the course of that day, and the long imposition I had to prepare for the following one, when I met a drove of mules carrying bags of charcoal. They were driven by a big boy, who seemed to be abusing his power most shamefully, and ill-using the poor patient animals in his charge. I was very savagely inclined, and longed for a legitimate subject to expend my wrath upon. So I accosted the young tyrant in no very guarded terms, considering the disparity of size and strength between us.

"Hollo, sir, how can you whack these poor brutes so abominably?"

"I'll whack you instead if you don't mend your manners; it's no odds to me whether I whop a mule or a donkey."

I ground my teeth with rage at this impertinent reply, but for that moment I had my temper still under my own control. Not for long though did I continue even outwardly calm; one poor beast had a burden a great deal too heavy for him.

"Ease off that sack," I exclaimed; "don't you see the poor fellow's tottering, and will be down altogether in a minute?" and as I spoke, down came the poor mule, and lay struggling on the ground.

"Oh, bother!" shouted the tormentor, at the same time administering a kick to the staring ribs of the unfortunate animal; "are you going to keep me here all day? Get up, do, you good-for-nothing, lazy villain."

This was more than human nature could stand,

and I rushed forward and attempted to unfasten the sack.

"Now, mind your own business and let that alone, or *I'll* teach you to meddle with what doesn't concern you," shouted the great, ungainly lad.

I gave no heed to him, and continued trying to release the mule. The poor animal breathed so hard I felt convinced he was suffering dreadfully, and tears ran down my face, tears more of rage than of sorrow, at the thought of the brutality to which he had been subjected.

"Don't touch him or me," I roared out ; "get away ; I wont listen to a word you say."

"Wont you ? then take that ;" and he hit me a blow that nearly knocked me head over heels.

I rushed at him like a fury, and strange to say, with a kind of supernatural strength. A good cause always brings courage, and even in that moment of angry excitement a thought came into my head that I was emulating the deeds of the knights of old in protecting the oppressed. Alas ! instead of a beautiful lady, the victim was only a dirty old mule, but it did not matter, here was at least an adventure ; and strong in the recollection of the fight between Christian and Apollyon, I belaboured my adversary with all my might. He seemed astonished at my prowess, and did not return my blows with the ardour I had anticipated.

"Leave off," he exclaimed, energetically ; "have done now, do."

"Not till you promise to be kind to the mule,"

was my answer, and I continued hitting as vigorously as before.

"I wont, the mule's mine and not yours."

"Very well then, you shall have plenty more; take that—and that—and that—and that."

Oppressors are generally cowardly, and this case proved no exception to the rule. Very soon I had astonished the mind and wounded the body of my Apollyon.

"Let me go," he yelled out; "you're strangling me," as I held on tight by his collar.

"Very well, Apolly—I mean, what's your name, I wont, until you promise to take the sack off the mule."

"I shan't," he cried; "and I ain't a Polly, neither, so *there*," and the fight recommenced.

"Well done, Jack, hit him again," a clear voice called out, and looking up for a moment, I saw the rosy face of Mary Alton peeping through the hedge. It may easily be imagined I did not require a second invitation, but proceeded to hit him again with the greatest pleasure imaginable.

"Now give over, or I'll keep on hitting you till to-morrow morning," said I.

"Well, I'll do it," said the sulky fellow; "you've got the best of it this time; but just let me catch you some day, and you shall get paid off for this, as sure as my name's Wat Jenkins."

So saying we parted, I making off for the field where Mary was stationed. Fool that I was, I never looked to see whether the promise was performed. I never thought of his deceiving me;

indeed I never thought of anything at all after I heard the sound of Mary's voice, except how soon I could finish the fight, and what would be the best way of getting to her, so I have no doubt the mule was considerably the worse off for my interference, instead of the better.

"I'll walk a little way home with you this evening, if you like," said Mary.

I was overjoyed, but could not imagine what had produced this sudden change.

"Why?" I asked. "You never would speak to me till now."

"Because I didn't know you were good for anything, but I see you are now. You helped the poor mule, and were not afraid of the big boy. I saw it all, and was watching, for I made up my mind you'd run away, but you didn't," clapping her hands for joy. "And do you know, Jack, that boy Jenkins is the most cruel lad in these parts? he killed one of our cats by knocking its head against a gate; and he does all kinds of savage things, not like good George Weston, who never sees anything in distress without helping it."

"And who is George Weston?" asked I, a secret and unacknowledged pang of jealousy coming into my mind as I inquired.

"Oh, he's a friend of mine, who comes over to see me sometimes on a Saturday," she answered, with great dignity; "he brings all kinds of pretty books that he won at the grammar-school to show us, only they're not much good to me, for I can't understand them."

"Would you like some books that you *can* understand?" said I. "Some books with pictures in them, and stories of people who went all round the world, and saw strange and wonderful things, and savages covered with blue paint, and women with their feet doubled up, and men with their heads under their arms?"

"Oh, that I should," she answered, to my great joy.

"That's right, Mary; then I'll bring you some, and stories of mermaids, and fairies, and wood-nymphs, and all kinds of curious beings."

"But are they real?" she asked, her face assuming an air of deep and serious inquiry. "George Weston says——"

"Oh, bother George Weston!" I mentally exclaimed. "Real? of course they are, only we are so stupid we can't see them. Now, Mary, if you or I were born on a Sunday we should be able to see the fairies every New Year's Eve."

"No, really!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "When I go home I'll ask my mother whether I was born on a Sunday. Were *you*? because if we both were, you know we might watch for the fairies together next New Year's Eve."

But, as ill luck would have it, I was born on a Friday, so that scheme fell to the ground. How fast Mary and I talked that evening: she seemed resolved to atone for her long silence, and I was only too happy to find some one who could appreciate all the odd ideas I loved to pour forth; for sometimes such an insane desire to talk possessed

me, that I would rather have talked to the hedges than have checked the flow of words that came rushing to my lips.

"I do believe you are nearly as clever as George," said Mary.

Nearly as clever as George! Here was a damper to my enthusiasm, but from that moment I resolved to surpass that individual in everything, even in the hated school studies. I knew I could do so; I had never even seen him, but something told me I had nothing to fear if I put forth all my powers.

"Nearly as clever as George," repeated I; "and what can George do?"

"Oh, everything; he does such wonderfully difficult sums, and is of so much use to his father, and sees after his farm for him, and takes half the trouble off his hands; and then he is so good to his mother and sisters, never worries them, but is always neat and handy, and ready to help in everything."

"Then I suppose he is a good deal older than you or me," I said, not best pleased at hearing such praises; for I was of such a jealous and exacting disposition, I could not bear my companion to be occupied with thoughts of any other person besides myself, even were I certain that she liked me best.

"O yes! I am only ten and he is fifteen; we used always to play together before we left our old home. He is very quiet though, and does not talk half as fast as you and I do."

"Well, Mary, I wonder you can like him so

much if he is so quiet, for you are so passionate, you know," said I, rather spitefully, I must own.

Mary blushed at the recollection of her violence, and as soon as I said it I was sorry I had reminded her of it.

"George was always so sorry when I was cross," she answered, gravely; "he used to look so serious, but he was never cross to me, though I used to do all I could to provoke him. Many a time he has talked kindly to me about it, and told me I should be so unhappy when I grew up."

"Very kind of him, certainly," I replied; "but do you know, Mary, I rather like a hot temper, I get so tired of kind people."

"Then you'd better come and see mother on a baking or a washing day," was the answer. "I don't think you'll be killed with kindness then."

I remembered my first visit to Little Dale, and was silent. We walked along for a minute or two without speaking, but I could not get rid of my curiosity about George, and soon recommenced my inquiries.

"What's George going to be when he grows up?"

"I don't know exactly; perhaps a farmer, but his father says he is too clever for that, and he must make him an agent, or a surveyor, or something. That *will* be grand, won't it? Fancy George driving all about the country in a gig, with long measuring chains, like Mr. Compass!"

"What slow work," said I. "I wouldn't be anything half so stupid. Don't tell anybody, but

I'm going to beg my father to send me to sea in a year or two. I must see the sea, I will see the sea, and some day I will have a ship of my own, and it shall be called after you, Mary."

"Oh, how nice; that will be delightful; but will you ever get leave to go?"

I felt a little provoked, though I wished my choice of a profession to be admired, that she should not express sorrow at my anticipated departure; but "a year or two" at that age appears as long a time to look forward to as a hundred years does to older mortals, and I soothed my wounded vanity with the idea that she would be very sorry when the time came.

"I'll get leave, never fear; and think of the corals and pearls I shall bring you, and the beautiful shells, and the wonderful sights I shall have to tell you about. Wont that be more interesting than acres, and roods, and perches, and butter, and cheese, and fat cattle?"

"O yes!" she replied; "and don't you get tired of doing the same things every day? I get so tired of the look of everthing. I quite long to change places with somebody. Wouldn't it be fun if I could be you and you could be me just for a little while, to see how it would seem?"

Here was a delightful discovery to me; I had found at last a kindred spirit, and I enthusiastically responded to her words.

"But," she continued, a shade of sadness passing over her face, "George says it's wrong to say that, and that it's a feeling we should pray against. Do

you ever pray? I don't mean to be inquisitive, but I want to know."

I thought for a moment. I always said my prayers, but I never called it praying, so I answered, "Mother makes me say 'Our Father' every night and morning."

"O yes! so does mine; but do you ever do as George does?"

"What's that?"

"Why, say a prayer if you are in trouble, or have got anything very difficult to do; George says it helps him so if he has got a troublesome sum to do, or if he is tired, and feels he can't do his work sometimes, it's all made light to him directly."

"Oh, that must be fancy," said I; "he'd do it just as well without if he was to try hard."

"Well," answered Mary, "he told me that would prevent my getting into passions if I could remember, and once when he had told me what to say I remembered it, and it stopped me quite short in the middle. But I forgot afterwards, and I always forget now," she answered, with a deep sigh.

I did not approve of her following George's directions so implicitly, and vehemently assured her that I was certain she was quite good enough, that it was very stupid to be always good, that a passion now and then was no harm, that clever people always got into passions, that George was very silly to expect everyone to be as quiet as himself, and a variety of other nonsense, which flattered the vanity of my little hearer, and placed our ac-

quaintanceship on a very agreeable footing as regarded myself.

From this day Mary and I were excellent friends. Her disposition attracted me more than any I had ever seen ; it enthralled me because it was so wayward. My friendship for her did not at all interfere with my affection for Sophy, that was quite another kind of love. Sophy's influence over me was as strong as ever, her counsels were to me like oil upon troubled waters ; but there was no excitement in loving her ; she did not worry me as Mary did ; we never had any quarrels and reconciliations ; but Mary was passionate and kind by turns ; she was always puzzling me by some of her moods ; I never knew what kind of a greeting I should receive from her ; I never knew whether we should part without a violent quarrel. The stormy part of my nature always turned to Mary ; moreover she entered into all my longings for adventure, all my projects for the future ; things that I had never dared to mention to the quiet, duty-loving Sophy. One of my many failings was a propensity to get tired of everything directly I had pursued it for a little while, and I have no doubt that I should soon have got tired of this new friendship if it had always gone on smoothly, but with two such dispositions there was little chance of that. Yet if I had wished calmly to seek advice, it would not have been to Mary, but to Sophy that I should have gone. I seemed to have two natures. Sophy was never jealous, her nature was by far too angelic for that. Mary often was

jealous, jealous even of dogs and horses, and many a violent scene we had, in which a repetition of the attempt with the garden-rake occasionally occurred. But generally we would have very happy games, though these were sometimes of a strange nature. One, I remember, was playing at an execution; I made a miniature gibbet, and Mary a straw man, and this little man we would hang with a running noose which we took turns to tie. This was a very serious business; and really, I believe, we considered we were fulfilling a sacred duty we owed to society in putting the atrocious straw criminal out of the world, though many a time we wept over our victim, such was the length to which our imaginations carried us. We would sit in grave conversation whilst he waved to and fro in the wind for ten minutes, after which time he was supposed to be quite dead, and then we cut him down and put him by in his box, ready to be hanged over again the next day.

We were very fond of collecting the mice the cats had killed, and giving them funeral honours. We used to do this with great solemnity, first wrapping the body in cotton wool or soft rag, and then placing it in a box which was tightly secured with string. I always dug the grave and acted the part of clergyman, whilst Mary filled both the offices of bearer and clerk. We had not the slightest intention of being profane in this curious mimicry; on the contrary, we thought it a good work, and both agreed we considered it a great shame that mice should not have Christian

burial. And yet we must have had some idea that it was not correct, for I recollect once the good old rector came in sight, and we both threw the coffin down and ran away in the middle of the service, which trepidation could not alone have proceeded from the wish to "do good by stealth and blush to find it fame." We both hid behind a large oak tree and watched till the coast was clear. We hoped our venerable pastor would pass without perceiving the melancholy object in his path, but such was not to be the case. He was slow in his movements and not particularly sharp-sighted, and as he leisurely pursued his way he was attracted by the little box. He perched his spectacles carefully on his nose, and turned the coffin over with his stick several times. He did not seem to know what to make of it, so he gravely seated himself on the grass at the side of the pathway, and slowly began untying the knot which fastened on the lid. We, all breathless as we were behind the tree, could hardly help laughing outright as we pictured to ourselves his amazement when he should see the tail of the mouse, which had to be doubled up before we could get it into the box. We enjoyed watching him, though we were rather frightened as to the result of the investigation. The sight of the tail seemed to make no impression on him; probably he had no idea what it was, for he proceeded to untie the string which secured the shroud. This gave him a great deal of trouble, and at last he took out his penknife and followed

the example of Alexander the Great. Never shall I forget the look of disgust and amazement which he gave on discovering the dead mouse ; it haunted me ever afterwards when I saw him in church. With a loud " Faugh !" he tossed mouse box, and all into the hedge, and went his way after scattering our property thus. With heavy hearts we watched him out of sight, and tried to collect the unhappy remains, which at last we succeeded in doing, and finished the duty interrupted by his appearance. Mary and I were firm believers in the immortality of animals. We both confessed to each other that heaven would be no heaven to us if our favourites, our pet animals, were not there. We made use of many arguments to prove that they would be, and succeeded in completely convincing ourselves. Our tame birds, when they died, were buried in the same spot of ground as the mice, but these we would honour with a monument, consisting of a piece of slate stuck on end into the ground, bearing an inscription scratched thereon with a nail. I have before spoken of my insatiable curiosity ; it went so far once as to lead me into becoming (in my own idea) a resurrectionist. I had an uncontrollable desire to see in what state a certain tame robin was a month after he had been buried ; besides, I wanted his coffin, as I thought it would do for some other bird who required one, having lately been murdered by a cat ; so, without saying a word to Mary, I went one evening and quietly dug him up. My curiosity was soon satisfied, and I never

again perpetrated a similar enormity. But my conscience was not so hastily satisfied. I considered that I had committed the awful crime of sacrilege, and hardly dared look any one in the face. I wept over my depravity every night, and at last I decided I would confess it to Mary. But then, what would she think of me! She would, perhaps, look on me with horror, perhaps never speak to me again. I felt so uncomfortable under the burden of my secret, that I resolved to risk the disclosure. I expected a burst of indignation, a storm of reproaches, but to my astonishment Mary did not seem at all to care. As soon as I found this, my remorse vanished. I laughed at my tender conscience, and thought what a fool I was to have suffered so much. How often this is the case! we suffer agonies at the recollection of some piece of folly or sinfulness, and when we find that it is little thought of by others, we banish the idea of guilt connected with it and look upon it as nothing. Not that my silly action was really wrong, but had I committed some horrible deed, I should have shaken off the recollection of it as easily, provided it was thought nothing of by others. If these papers ever find a reader, I fear I shall be considered tiresome for lingering so long amongst the pleasant scenes of my youth, but as I write, those scenes reappear before me so vividly, that I seem forced to commit to paper the recollections that would otherwise burn my heart, and though my tears are blinding me, I can still feel pleasure in these old memories.

Reader, be not hard upon me ! Remember, I am no happy old man, surrounded by merry grandchildren, who would love to hear of my childhood, but a melancholy recluse, unloved by a single human being.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD MAID.

I ALWAYS had a great terror of the supernatural, and though very courageous by daylight, could never be prevailed upon to go and look for anything at dusk in the old garrets at the top of the house, or to pass the churchyard after dark. The blue fires that danced on the graves terrified me beyond endurance: I saw them once as I crossed the churchyard to take a message to the parsonage, and though the rector explained to me that the appearances were caused by the decomposition of the bodies, and declared that there was nothing spiritual connected with them, nothing would induce me ever again to encounter them. Two other objects of terror embittered my life. The first was the only passage the farmhouse contained. It was a long, low, rambling house, and the second story was traversed by one passage with doors opening into it on each side. The room occupied by myself and my brothers was at the further end of this passage, and I always strove to reach it at full speed when I went upstairs to bed, trembling for fear either of the doors I passed should suddenly open, and a tall spectre issue forth to seize me by the hair. My candle often blew out, on account of the violence with

which I ran along the gusty corridor, and this increased my fears tenfold. Our home having formerly been an old mansion of some consideration, of course contained many more rooms than we actually needed, and I always believed these rooms were inhabited by ghosts. Few of the upper apartments were in good repair; there were holes in the floors, and strips of handsome, heavy, and very mouldy paper hung from the walls; apples were kept in one room; grain in another; and the exterior of the house presented a strange medley of blocked-up windows, broken mullions, and half-effaced stone scutcheons. The other object of my fear was a portrait, which hung opposite my bed, of an old lady with pink eyelids and sandy hair, dressed in black, with ruff and jewel-mounted fan. The eyes of this picture always rested on me, whichever way I turned; I was certain they moved. The expression of the countenance was that of intense melancholy, and a melancholy of a peculiar kind. The idea possessed me that this lady was my Fate; I could never forget her face; and years and years afterwards it still seemed to glare upon me. I was too great a moral coward to ask to have this picture removed, but nobody can tell the amount of suffering it caused me. I used to wake up in the middle of the night and fancy her eyes were changed to fire; I knew she still looked at me even in the dark, and then I would bury my head in the clothes, and be content with feeling her gaze instead of seeing it. Once I ventured to ask

my brothers if they did not think there was something very extraordinary about the picture, but their reply was that they saw nothing particular in it; and to my horror they began to shoot coffee beans at those wonderful ghastly eyes, which action seemed to me to be little short of sacrilege. There was no history of this lady; indeed, there was no history of any of the former possessors. I was rather glad of this, because I could make my own. It may seem strange that I, who had such intense curiosity concerning a future world, should be subject to these feelings of dread: I cannot account for it; I only know that so it was. I peopled the air with spirits; I dared not look at the dark corners of the room, for fear of seeing something more in them. I never confessed my fears; I was too much afraid of being laughed at. This horror of being laughed at followed me all my life: I would rather have been struck than sneered at, and could have borne a great injury better than a joke at my expense. I remember once seriously contemplating suicide in consequence of being made the subject of ridicule. I opened the attic window, and decided on throwing myself out of it on to the pavement below, but my resolution gave way at sight of some sharp railings whereon I might possibly be suspended in my descent. I thought it would be very ignominious to be found in such a position, and therefore abandoned my intention. My life became a great deal pleasanter after I had made acquaintance with Mary, merely because it became more stormy. We had, how-

ever, some delightfully quiet afternoons, though these were short and far between. Mary had a great friend in the village, an old lady of the name of Clarke, and her cottage was truly an abode of peace. Mary's friends were generally old people, I imagine in consequence of her love of quarrelling. With those of her own age there was always an idea of rivalry, and her games with them usually ended in a violent battle ; but with her elders she could have no dispute ; and in spite of her extraordinary temper she was endowed with a reverence for age which I have seldom seen. She used to take me to see Miss Clarke, or Mrs. Clarke, as she was always called, though she had never been married. We always met with a kind reception from this excellent old lady, who did all in her power to make our visits agreeable. Her little white-washed cottage was a pattern of neatness, the garden was attended to with the greatest care, she had the most beautiful roses that had ever been seen in the parish, and her honey was renowned in all the surrounding country. Her appearance was equally prepossessing with that of everything belonging to her. She was always dressed in mourning, but with the most exquisite neatness, and with an attention to the becoming which the most careless observer could perceive to be entirely unconscious and unstudied. She had the most benevolent eyes ; I never saw any like them except my sister Sophy's ; but her greatest beauty in my opinion was her snow-white hair, which hung down in two large curls, and shone

like silver. She had lived many years in the village, and was respected by everybody. She was present in every cottage scene of sickness or sorrow, a universal friend and comforter : no village rejoicing was considered complete without her. Had any one heard of the safe arrival in Australia of some beloved emigrant—it was to Mrs. Clarke the news was first told. Had any one's baby cut its first tooth—it was immediately carried to Mrs. Clarke to be admired. Was there a happy marriage to take place—Mrs. Clarke was the first to hear the tidings, and the first to congratulate ; and great was the merriment one day when, on an occasion of this sort, the future bride and bridegroom both met at her garden gate, each having been unaware of the other's intention of communicating his and her happiness to the universal sympathizer. A problem that occupied the attention of the village gossips for years was, "why Mrs. Clarke had not married." She was certainly "a born lady," evidently well off, (witness the quantities she gave away,) she must have been very handsome, and everybody knew she was very good. What could the reason be ? It was of no use speculating, for no one could find out. She had one servant, called Hannah, who in appearance rather resembled her, but not so in disposition. I used to think Hannah as cross as her mistress was kind. I wonder why good and thrifty housekeepers are generally such vixens. Hannah was always busy and singularly taciturn ; she would obey all her mistress's benevolent injunctions without

uttering a word in disparagement of her arrangements, but she never originated a good deed. When they first came into the village, it was considered a good move by the gossips to ask Hannah out to tea, hoping by that means to find out all about her mistress. The attempt signally failed. They might as well have tried to get information out of a stone wall. Hannah drank all their tea and ate all their cake, but gave them not one particle of enlightenment ; and at last, finding the arrangement not only unprofitable but expensive, they discontinued the invitations. I used often to hear my mother speak of their discomfiture, in which she much rejoiced, as gossip of all kinds disgusted her. Nothing pleased Mary and me so much as an afternoon spent at Miss Clarke's. This was curious, as most people found us very troublesome, and we hated being kept in order. We were generally either quarrelling with one another, or else in such exuberant spirits that no quiet occupation could be carried on in our vicinity. Miss Clarke, however, never seemed to find us troublesome. Come when we would, we were always sure of a warm welcome. She never scolded us because our hair was untidy, or our clothes torn (as often happened ; for though our mothers started us off scrupulously neat, we were always sure of getting into some mischief, bird-nesting, or nutting, or hunting for blackberries, before we arrived at our destination) ; she never seemed to remark if red eyes or a scratched face gave token of a recent disagreement (for we were apt, I am sorry to say,

to fall out by the way); she laughed when we laughed, sympathized with all our little joys and sorrows, admired Mary to my heart's contentment, and looked upon me as a prodigy of genius. It was our great delight to observe that she spoke to us "as if we were grown up," and treated us "like ladies and gentlemen." When we came, her beautiful little set of Dresden was used for tea, a snowy tablecloth of finest damask was always spread, the table was placed in our favourite position in the large window which opened upon the prettiest view in the country, the river running below, and the blue hills just visible in the distance, a little nose-gay was gathered for each of us, and oh, joy of joys! we always had bread and honey. After tea, if the evening was fine, she would take us out for a walk, wherever we chose; it seemed quite indifferent to her as long as we were pleased; or if we preferred being in-doors, she read to us some fine old ballad such as "Chevy-Chase" or "Sir Patrick Spence," with a power and distinctness I have seldom heard equalled. This was not the only instruction she gave us though, for we never parted without hearing a chapter in the Bible; and though, as I have before stated, I had little taste for religious subjects, her anecdotes and quaint illustrations made interesting to me what would otherwise have been irksome and disagreeable. Soon were the good impressions lost; the little I learned was head work and not heart work, and I forgot in one moment what had taken ten to explain. It was not so with Mary: going home, she would

sometimes refuse to enter into conversation with me, and when I asked the reason, she would say, "Don't talk to me now, I want to think of what Miss Clarke has been telling us." I felt inclined for a moment to hate Miss Clarke, the large Bible, and everything belonging to her, but did not dare say so, for fear Mary might resume the unpleasant silences to which, in common with myself, she was subject for three or four days together. She could bear anything better than the slightest depreciation of the friend whose influence was the only check upon her strange temper ; and for a few days after a visit to this kind old lady, her manners were always softer and her voice always sweeter. I have often wondered since how it was that I never profited more from this beautiful example of Christian kindness ; but though I saw and admired, I could not practise. I used to marvel how Miss Clarke could do so much good, and yet never seem hurried ; be always busy, and yet never irritated ; always neat and pretty, and yet never seem to think of self ; always sympathizing, and yet never interfering. She did not, as some most excellent people do, grudge the time spent in a friendly chat, or when she arrived at the house of a friend, seem only anxious to find out in how short a time she could possibly get away again. She did not make those who called upon her feel that she was painfully counting how many minutes they were obliging her to waste ; she always had time to attend even to the most frivolous woes and distresses. It was not painfully obvious to the objects of her charity

that they were only attended to and cared for for the sake of the salvation of the soul of their benefactress, they felt that she took a real interest in their welfare. In the course of my travels in after years, I remember walking in the streets of a French town. A poor old blind woman was going in the same direction, feeling her way with the help of a stick. She seemed so weak and unsteady in her walk, that I slackened my pace to watch her, in case I might be of service in the crowded thoroughfare. I had soon occasion to offer my help, for which she thanked me over and over again.

"Mais," she said, turning her sightless eyes to me in a plaintive manner, "*j'espère que ce n'est pas pour l'amour de Dieu !*"

The poor woman had evidently been helped before, but in a way which showed her it was not for her own sake. This was not the way in which my early friend dispensed her charities ; they were all done certainly "*pour l'amour de Dieu,*" but with a kindness and heartiness that showed His service was a delight and not a task. I have dwelt long upon the character of this worthy friend of my youth, but it is a bright spot to look back upon at the end of a long, dark pilgrimage ; there can be none like her, for I am sure the world has never produced such another. Oh, that I had valued and appreciated at their true worth the peaceful hours spent in that little cottage ! But then I did not care for them. I could not value peace ; I longed for something dark and stormy. I have lived since in darkness and storm, and now I long

for peace! How we despise what is easily obtained! How we long for what seems unattainable; and when at last we have obtained it, we value it no longer!

Curiously enough, Mary and I, who were great favourites with Miss Clarke, were one day let into the secret the whole village would have given their eyes to know. This was, however, when we were somewhat older than at the period I am now describing; but I will relate it now, as it falls within the scope of my subject. It was a rainy afternoon, and we were spending it at the cottage. Miss Clarke had left us alone for a few minutes in the little drawing-room, and I, with my usual curiosity, was peeping, and prying, and opening everything I could lay my hands upon. There were several miniature cases and other things about, and I unscrupulously examined them, heedless of Mary's expostulations.

'O Jack! do let things alone; Miss Clarke will be in in a minute, and you know she does not like meddling.'

I felt quite convinced that Miss Clarke would not mind anything either of us did, but Mary had not so much self-confidence. Most of the portraits were very uninteresting; old gentlemen with pigtails, and ladies with powdered heads, and no particular variety of expression. Mary soon came and looked over my shoulder, and appeared quite as much absorbed as myself in this investigation. At last we came to the only portrait which much pleased us; it was a double miniature, a lady and a gentleman. The lady was very dark

and handsome, with arched eyebrows. She looked melancholy though, as if she had endured privation, and had been either a sufferer herself, or witnessed much suffering in others. The gentleman was fair, with blue eyes and curling hair, and such a joyous expression of countenance, that it did one's heart good to look at it.

"Who can they be?" was our mutual exclamation.

"They are neither of them the least like Miss Clarke ; they can't be her relations."

"They look like husband and wife," said Mary.

"They are not the least like each other," said I.

"Of course not, that's just the reason ; people always care for their opposites," was the wise reply.

I was beginning, according to my usual custom, to cavil at and find fault with this gravely pronounced opinion, when the door opened, and we both jumped as Miss Clarke entered. Her gentle eyes glistened with tears as she looked over our shoulders ; I saw at a moment she was not angry with us for prying, but painful recollections seemed to be awakened by the sight of the miniatures.

"Who are these people ?" I said to her, in my inconsiderate manner.

"Hush," said Mary to me, in a whisper ; "you are always asking questions."

Though I was so fond of Mary, this observation made me do it again immediately, for opposition was a thing I could not endure.

"Who are these people ?" I said again ; "and are they relations of yours, and what is their history ? Oh, do tell me, I do so long to know !"

"Sit down," she answered, "and I will tell you, as you are so curious to know. It is no secret, but I do not wish it repeated all over the village, and I think I may trust you and Mary. It may be a useful lesson to you, for in the course of your lives you are sure to meet with some sorrow and disappointment, and I want to show you that, though outward events may sometimes turn out very differently from what we either hope or expect, yet they have little to do with happiness, for as long as we do right we are sure to be happy.

I began to yawn, for I thought a sermon was coming instead of a romantic history, and I was rather disappointed. Seeing this, she hastened to begin her narration.

"I am afraid I must talk to you a great deal about myself, if I tell you all about those two concerning whose history you seem so curious."

"Oh, pray do, Miss Clarke," interrupted Mary; "just the very thing I should like."

"Well, suppose we light the fire first, then; for though it is summer, I see no reason why we should be cold and uncomfortable, and then we will settle ourselves to talk; and Johnny, you can go to sleep if you don't like it, for I know your tricks of asking me to tell you something, and then not listening.

I promised attention, and the history turned out to be so interesting, that I had no difficulty in keeping my word.

CHAPTER VI.

A LOVE STORY.

YOU must know, she said, that my old home was very far from here. My father was a merchant who had made a great deal of money, and I was his only child. He bought a pretty place in the north of England, and we lived there together very happily. He was not a genius, but a good, sensible, straightforward English character, with a well-stored mind, a taste for literature, and great admiration for the fine arts, particularly for painting. He delighted in collecting pictures; and from my childhood I was surrounded by every object calculated to refine the mind, and raise the intellect. He was a grave man, and I had lost my mother, whom I could hardly remember; so, although I was very fond of him, I had little congenial companionship. There were few young people in the neighbourhood, and those few I did not much care for; we had books, and flowers, and everything pretty at home, and nothing to desire or seek for beyond our own premises. My father was not fond of society, and his leisure hours were occupied in educating me; so we lived for the most part a secluded life, and my utmost dissipation was a concert in the county town, when any

celebrity from the metropolis visited it. My usual pleasures were walks and rides with my father, and of the world in general I knew little. The time came when a change was to occur in the quiet routine of our daily life. Barracks were built in our county town, and not long afterwards an infantry regiment took up its quarters there. My father did not seek or wish to know any of the officers; he hated dinner-parties, and the usual routine of an interchange of civilities, and dreaded having his solitary life broken in upon. One morning he came into my little room, where I was busy upon a difficult passage of Herodotus, (which I hated, and which he insisted upon my construing,) and throwing down a note upon the table with such force as to upset the somewhat rickety ink-glass I was using, and spatter my as yet untouched sheet of paper, he exclaimed, with an asperity of temper unusual with him,—

“Here’s a bore! I wish people would let us alone! Now we shall have our quiet life disturbed. As if, forsooth, I was to know the sons of all the people I met in my youth. However, I suppose I must ask him to dinner once at least.”

I proceeded to read the note, and found it was from an old friend of my father’s, one whom he had not met for years, asking him to notice and befriend his son, an officer in the regiment which had just been quartered in the neighbourhood. I too, rather disliked the idea, for I did not relish the prospect of having one man to entertain; and having been brought up in such seclusion, I

laboured under a singular lack of small talk. However, this young man, whose name was Leonard, came ; and my father was charmed with him. He was so merry, so good-natured, so willing to listen to all my father's stories and disquisitions, so much interested in our pursuits, so fond of pictures, and sang with so much taste and feeling, that he soon became our most intimate friend, and had free leave to come in and out just as he pleased. Of course we were very much thrown together, but I got so accustomed to him that the idea of our marrying never entered my head. We walked, we rode, we botanized, we read, we sang, we amused ourselves together, and I soon entertained quite a sisterly love for him. We told each other all our little plans, all our little cares ; and as I had never had a brother, I was delighted with this intercourse. I never read novels ; not that I was forbidden to do so, for my father had what are called very liberal ideas in all matters, but he found me so much occupation in graver studies that I never had the time to do so. Therefore I knew nothing about love or lovers, and did not fancy there was anything peculiar in Leonard's coming so often. I thought it very natural that he should enjoy being with such a clever man as my father, and I was both fond of hearing them talk and of joining in the conversation myself. It is such a mistake to fancy three cannot be agreeable company, there is no society so pleasant ; for what is the use of two people discussing a subject if there is not a third to appeal to ? I do not know what

my father thought all this time, I fancy he imagined us both too young to dream of matrimony. Things went on in this manner for a long time, but at last they came to a crisis. I was an early riser, and delighted in taking long walks before breakfast. One morning, one lovely fresh spring morning, I was returning to the house after a ramble in the park under the shade of the old oak trees, when who should I see coming down the terrace steps but Leonard with an open letter in his hand. I was much surprised, for I knew that in general he was indolent, and by no means an early riser. He walked quickly to meet me, and I saw by his manner that something had happened which agitated him much, though he tried to appear calm.

"Good morning," he said; "I thought I should find you out of doors, and I have got something particular to say to you."

"Tell it me quick," said I; "I dare say it is nothing, after all; you are always trying to frighten me."

Here his face grew very sad, and he said, "How can you be so unkind as to joke on a subject which is so important to me?"

"I don't know what the subject is yet," replied I, sharply, "so how can I joke upon it?"

All this time, in spite of my light manner, I was dying to hear what he had to say, and only strove to hide my curiosity by an affectation of indifference. He leant against the balustrade, for we had slowly returned together to the terrace, and in a voice

that quite frightened me by its deep, low tones, so different to the merry ones I usually heard from him, said, "I am going away." I fancied he was pretending; so with a true love of mischief, I said, "Now, don't be sentimental; you haven't got the sort of face for it; it won't do at all; you look so much better when you laugh."

"*Laugh*, indeed!" he exclaimed, almost in a passion; "you little know what you are talking about; I tell you it is really true, I am going away; here is the letter ordering our regiment to Ireland, and I may never see you again. O Annie, Annie, how unkind of you not to be sorry when I am so very miserable!"

Going away! A sudden chill struck to my heart. What should I do without him? I had got so used to him, I never thought of his going away, never dreamt of the possibility of such a thing. It was only at that moment I discovered how much I cared for him. It was only at that moment I saw how much he cared for me. He perceived directly that I was as much grieved as he was, and in a rapid and almost incoherent manner proceeded to tell me how he had always felt a deep affection for me—how it had begun the first time we met, and increased until he could hardly control it—how that the difference between our fortunes, for he was poor and I was an heiress, had prevented his acknowledging it earlier; "and Annie," he continued, "if you had only been poor I would have told you long ago how much I cared for you, but I was so afraid of being thought a

fortune-hunter ; besides, I felt it was not fair to take advantage of your having seen no one but myself ; but now I cannot help it ; and tell me, tell me quickly, is there any hope for me ?”

All this was said so fast, I felt quite breathless, and could hardly understand him, but when he stopped I said, “ Leonard, I do not know whether I am doing right or wrong, I only know that life would be very gloomy to me without you.” We left the terrace an engaged couple. I need not tell you all the nonsense we talked that morning ; we quite forgot all about breakfast ; and when at last we entered the dining-room we found my father with a face of dismay, trying to make tea. He guessed immediately what had happened ; I was afraid he would be angry, but he merely said he must make more inquiries about Leonard before he gave his entire consent, and in the meanwhile seemed very well pleased that things should go on as they were. At last everything was quite settled. Leonard was to sell out of the army and settle down as a country gentleman ; live with us at the park, and be my father’s adopted son. How happy we were for one short week ; what sunshine seemed thrown over everything ! The happiness of a whole life seemed crowded into that little time. How strange that it could not last ! But if it had lasted, I think I should never have wanted to leave this world, never have looked forward to dying with the peace and happiness I do now.

Leonard was to go home to arrange some affairs, and the marriage was to take place in a few

months. We had kind and satisfactory letters from his father, although he did not conceal from us he thought his son rather too young for matrimony. All seemed prosperous and happy, when my father was taken ill with a slow, painful, and lingering complaint. His cure was pronounced hopeless ; and it was necessary for me to have a companion in the house besides the old nurse who waited upon him. This companion I found in the only one of our neighbours with whom I cared much to associate. But I must describe her, or you will not understand what comes afterwards. Her name was Emmeline Woodford. She was the most peculiar being I think I have ever known ; very beautiful, very good, and yet extremely eccentric. She was fond of study, and passionately addicted to seclusion ; very learned—but this you would never find out until after a long acquaintance. She delighted in gaining ideas, but did not care to communicate them except to those who shared in her tastes. But these she seldom saw, for, as I told you before, she was so fond of solitude that it was only by much persuasion she could be drawn into society. She had no sisters, but several brothers ; her parents were very fond of her ; nevertheless, at my earnest entreaty, they consented to spare her to me for a time. I had seen more of her than of any other girl in the neighbourhood, and what I had seen inspired me with intense love and admiration. Her abandonment of self, her love of study, for its own sake, her penetrating mind, and, above all, a kind of *musical nature*, which seemed to draw har-

mony from even the most discordant circumstances, pleased, interested, fascinated me, and I would gladly have been more intimate than her reserved nature allowed me to be. In appearance she was a complete contrast to myself, being dark, with glossy black hair, brown eyes, and very pale countenance. I had sometimes tried to induce Emmeline to join our little parties of pleasure, but nothing would prevail upon her to do so. I used to say to her, "Emmeline, you are a misanthrope." She would smilingly answer, "So you think, because I am not always ready to laugh and play and waste my time; but if ever you are in sorrow or illness, and really need help, send for me then, and you shall see if I am a misanthrope." This promise I now claimed. She came, and nothing could exceed the kindness and sympathy I received from her. I shall pass over the history of those long and dreary days, and come to the time after my father's funeral. Leonard was with us then, and an elderly female relation. I had no spirits for society, even for theirs, and used to seclude myself in the little room where I so often had studied with my father, and ponder over the books he had given me, wishing and longing for him to come back. Emmeline, at my entreaty, had prolonged her visit some weeks; and she and Leonard were much together. I was pleased at this; I liked *my* friend to be *his* friend, and was glad he should have a more cheerful companion than I was then able to be. The conservatory opened into the drawing-room, and a person in the drawing-room

might very easily see or hear what was taking place in the conservatory without being perceived by any one there. I came downstairs one afternoon at a time when I was usually alone in my own room, and caught the sound of voices in the conservatory. The first words attracted my attention, and I could not help listening. Very wrong, you will say, and I own it, but as it turned out it was fortunate I did so.

"O Leonard, Leonard, it would break her heart!"

These words were uttered by Emmeline's voice. An instinct told me they alluded to *me*. Leonard answered—Leonard, whom I had thought so good, so noble, so true,—

"How *can* I help it, Emmeline? can we control our hearts? can I help loving you? and do you not love me? Then why should I be forced to a union I detest?"

I cannot tell you what I felt when I heard these words. I marvel how I kept my senses; but the violence of the shock did not prevent my wishing to hear more. Emmeline continued in her calm, sweet voice,—

"Overcome it, Leonard; your faith is plighted, you have no business to break it. I shall make some excuse, and leave this house to-morrow."

"Then do you feel nothing for *me*?" was Leonard's answer.

"Nothing," continued Emmeline; "you have done wrong, and you must repent." But her voice quivered, and I, with a woman's penetration, could

discover she loved him. I was astonished—thunderstruck; could two beings, so opposite in their natures, so different in their tastes, pursuits, and inclinations, could they really care for each other? I went upstairs, locked the door, threw myself on the sofa, and tried to think what was to be done. I could not collect my thoughts; and I feared at one time I should become delirious. The window was open, the delicious scent of the jessamine that climbed round it penetrated the room, a little bird was singing most sweetly in the sunshine, and everything spoke of happiness. Alas! how everything within was changed! how different life appeared to me now from what it did half an hour ago! And I had no kind father or mother to consult. I had only myself to rely on, for I would not for worlds have told any one else my perplexities. An idea flashed into my mind. Love as they might, they would never be able to marry; Leonard was a younger son; Emmeline one of a large family; it was impossible. I triumphed in this idea for a while; then the thought came to me, "If his heart is not yours, why grudge it to any one else? what have you more to do with it? What, indeed! I got up and looked out of the window. I gazed on the fair green woods, the pretty garden beneath, the farms in the distance, the cattle grazing so peacefully. I wished I were a cow, or a sheep, or even an insect crawling on the window-pane. I felt so sick at heart, I knew not what I wished. I looked towards the high road. There was a hearse moving along it, and a

funeral procession. I thought, "See what we shall all come to, it does not much matter whether the years beforehand are happy or miserable." And then I leant my head against the window-sill, and cried till I was tired. After a while I looked up, and my eyes rested on an engraving of Lady Jane Grey parting from her husband, which my father had given me. Involuntarily I contrasted her fate and mine. "She is giving up one who is true," thought I, "and yet she bears it bravely; shall I repine at giving up one who is false?" And then I remembered all the lessons of fortitude my father had taught me out of ancient and modern history, and I thought, "Now is the time to put in practice what I have learnt; what is the use of my having heard so much of strength and generosity, if I find it totally inapplicable to my own case?" But I felt so weak, so weary; as if I had no strength to struggle, much less to conquer. I heard the church bell toll for the funeral, and I wished it was for mine. Presently my eyes fell on the Bible; I opened it mechanically, and the first text I saw was, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The words gave me comfort, I read them over and over again, and though at first I could hardly perceive their meaning, owing to the chaos of my ideas, gradually a light fell upon my heart, and I was enabled to perceive that my way was not intended to be one of entire misery. I felt calmer, and was able to pray for guidance, and the guidance came. I remembered all that was said in Holy Writ about for-

givenness of injuries, trust, faith, fortitude. I remembered all that is promised to those who steadfastly endure, and I felt certain Heaven would help me and take care of me. Then I considered what was best to be done in worldly matters, and pity stole into my heart, when I thought how sad it was for Emmeline and Leonard, if they really loved each other, not to be able to marry. I resolved that no means should be wanting on my part to make them happy. I decided what to do, and went downstairs with a firm and resolute heart. They were together in the drawing-room. Both looked unhappy. Emmeline came towards me as I entered, and said,—

“Annie, dear, I must leave you to-morrow.”

I answered as calmly as I could, “You think so, but it will not be necessary.”

She looked astonished; and, anxious to end the painful scene, I turned to Leonard, and said, quickly,—

“Leonard, you have done me a great injury, and there is only one way in which it can be repaired.”

He turned deadly pale and said, “Then it is as I fancied, you have seen, you know——”

“Enough,” I answered, “to feel that our union can never take place. Never mind what I have seen, what I have heard; it is of no use to talk about it; I only know that you have it in your power to repair the wrong you have done me.”

Both stood motionless with surprise, and at length Leonard answered, “Tell me in what way,

and I give you my word of honour it shall be done."

I did not think much of his word of honour after what had passed between us two, but I did not say so. I said, "You love Emmeline, Emmeline loves you."

"O Annie! Annie!" cried Emmeline, in a voice of agony, "indeed, indeed, I could not help it!"

"I know you could not," I replied; "few people can control their feelings; and as *I* cannot make Leonard happy, I hope *you* will be able to do so. No impediment that I can remove shall stand in the way, and if you agree to do as I wish, much sorrow will be prevented on all sides."

I then proceeded to tell them I intended to make arrangements for the transfer to them of as much property as would enable them to live comfortably and without any anxiety for the future. Both were rapturous in their expressions of gratitude, but I fancied a slight shade passed over Leonard's countenance. I imagined then that it proceeded from remorse at his behaviour to *me*, but from his after conduct and the vanity I discovered in his character I now cannot help thinking it was pique at finding out I could, as he imagined, so easily give him up. Little more remains to be said concerning this part of my history. I was very unhappy at first, though I took care not to show it, but gradually I got over it, and became as you see me now. I have told you this history, not because I think it is a strange or uncommon one, or because I want you to think it

generous of me to do as I did, but because I wish you to see that as long as we trust in Heaven we can never be entirely miserable; and broken hearts, though all very well in poetry, only exist, I am convinced, in company with ill-regulated minds.

Here Miss Clarke paused in her story, and again looked at the miniatures with sorrowful eyes.

"But you have not told me," said I, "about those pictures."

"They are portraits of Leonard and Emmeline," she answered. "They were sent to me some years afterwards."

"Were they happy together?" asked Mary.

"I fear not," replied our kind friend. "Leonard's character was not one that promised much happiness. There was no actual fault to be found in him, but he was volatile, and utterly a stranger to any deep feeling except from the impulse of the moment. Emmeline was of an unworldly and poetical temperament; she could not understand Leonard's inconsistencies and vagaries, and he could not sympathize with her high-flown ideas. They had captivated each other's imaginations, but their attachment was not founded on principle. I saw a good deal of them a short time after their marriage, and I was a fair judge, because I could appreciate the good qualities of both. I knew them better than they knew each other, and I could see that each was a source of constant torment to the other. Leonard was provoked at his wife's gravity, and Emmeline felt irritated at the light manner in which he treated subjects she

considered of paramount importance. It was a great pity they ever married, and I felt afterwards sorry I had had any share in smoothing the way to their union, but I could not have done otherwise, they seemed then so devoted to each other. After Emmeline's death I lost sight of Leonard; I believe he went to India, and some time afterwards I heard he had married again, which is just what I should have imagined the most likely thing in the world. I could not continue living in the place where I had been so very happy, so I sold it and moved further south. I don't think the rest of my life would interest you: it had no adventure and no story. I was travelling once through this country and was attracted by the beauty and the quiet of this little village. I had no ties to bind me to any particular place, so I determined to settle down here, and have had no reason to repent of my determination."

CHAPTER VII.

JEALOUSY.

I HAVE often thought since, it was rather strange of Miss Clarke to tell Mary and me this love story, but I am sure she did it for some purpose, and I think on Mary it had the desired effect, as the history of after years will show. But it is time to return to my own story. I have before said, I was possessed of a furiously combative spirit, and now my great wish was to meet the wonderful friend George, whom Mary talked so much about, and engage him in some quarrel, which might justify me in licking him. An opportunity soon occurred, only it ended rather differently from what I had intended. It was a half holiday, and I had taken a message to Little Dale from my mother. On entering as usual by the back door I saw Mary talking to a fresh, happy-looking youth, a few years older than herself, whom I rightly guessed to be my supposed enemy. She turned round to me and said, "Oh, Jack, here's George." What a foolish little sentence to be angry with, and yet there was something in the tone that made me feel furious: I thought she said it as if she wished me to be as pleased to see him as she was. I was determined not to be civil, and so I said, "Oh, ay,

I suppose so." Mary got angry and said, "Well, I think you might shake hands with my friend, only I suppose you are in your sulks this afternoon, you look horridly ill-tempered." Plain speaking is a fault of youth; as we grow older we learn to conceal our feelings. George came forward in a good-tempered manner and shook hands so frankly, that I was half-ashamed of my bearishness, and was obliged to exert myself to be a little agreeable. Mary's mother happened to be absent, so there was no check on our hilarity; we went into the garden, ate gooseberries, and chattered like so many chaffinches. There was no interruption to our friendly conversation, until George inadvertently tripped me up and caused me to stumble into a currant-bush. In the morbid state of my feelings nothing would do but I must imagine he had done it on purpose, and in order to make me look ridiculous in Mary's eyes; so losing all self-control, I rushed at him and tried to knock him down. He was much stronger than I was, and if I had thought for a moment I should never have made such an attempt. He turned quickly round, stooped, caught hold of me by the ankles, and caused me to stand on my hands in the most ignominious manner. It was so quickly and cleverly done that I had no time to prevent it, and there I was, cutting the most ridiculous figure, with my heels in the air, and Mary in fits of laughter. I should not have cared half as much if he had knocked me down and hurt me, but to be treated like a naughty child and laughed at,

was more than I could bear. I grew black in the face with rage, and the welkin resounded with my cries. George still held me by the heels, and kept me turned upside down.

"This side upwards, with care," said he, laughing.

"Fragile," said Mary, "very fragile, and not to be shaken on any account."

It was lucky they did not let me loose at that moment, or I should have certainly done one of them a mischief. I roared, bellowed, and kicked. George's wrists seemed made of iron. He took good care not to hurt me, and this annoyed me more than anything else; it seemed such an assertion of superiority.

"Now, old fellow," he said, "will you leave off? and I'll let you go."

"Yes," continued Mary; "do leave off and be friends, and you shall have some new milk."

I was too much enraged to attend to her, but bit the grass in my fury, and continued making a fearful noise, which did not alarm her in the least, as she was accustomed to do the same herself. It is wonderful how little sympathy passionate people have for those who are afflicted with the same unhappy tempers as themselves. The scene was ended by the sudden appearance of Mary's mother. A wonderful transformation immediately took place. George let me go suddenly, we all stood bolt upright in the garden walk, and though very hot and red, tried to look as if nothing had happened.

"So, indeed!" began the voluble matron, "I

can't leave you three together, but you must be fighting and quarrelling like a parcel of lunatics. George, I'm ashamed of you ; you didn't use to be riotous. Jack, *you* never were anything else, so go along with you, do, and don't let me see you again until your manners are mended."

I rushed out of the garden, banged the gate behind me with vehemence, and ran down the hill at such a rate that I nearly went head over heels into the brook below it. This recalled me to a sense of my ridiculous behaviour, and I sat down under a tree and sulked. Presently I heard a good-humoured voice behind, "Hollo, old fellow, watching the fish rise this fine evening?"

I turned and saw my enemy George. I thought he had come to triumph over me, and remembering the distinction drawn by Mary's mother between him and myself, I hated him more and more. I had hated him before I saw him. O sons of Cain ! How closely our natures resemble that of the first murderer ! I would not answer him, I would not look at him. He continued,—

"Now don't bear malice, Jack ; I ran all the way down here to tell you how sorry I am you were turned out, and how I told Mrs. Alton I was just as bad as you—I wouldn't stay there after she sent you away ; now do be friends ; think of our little quarrel as a game of play."

"Great fun for you, you playful lamb," I answered, gruffly ; "don't talk to me about malice, but just go away, will you?"

"Well, you are a rough customer," he said ; "it

can't be pleasant for you, sitting in the dumps all alone, you'd better come with me and walk up the hill ; the sun is setting so beautifully ; do come and cheer up."

"I tell you I don't want to see you or the sun either ; can't you leave a fellow alone ?"

"You might answer civilly ; but if you don't want to come, of course I can't make you ; so good-bye," and away he went.

Such is the perversity of human nature. I felt almost sorry I had not accepted his offer, and for a moment I thought of calling him back, but my pride would not allow me to do so. It was a clear, calm sky, the brook rippled musically over the stones, the trees looked so cool in their heavy green stillness, and all without was happy and peaceful. Within it was very different ; I felt I had lost the chance of making a friend.

My conscience was a very uncomfortable companion for a long time after this, but strange to say it effected no change in my outward behaviour ; on the contrary, I was even more rude to George than I had been before. I was mad to be revenged on him ; be not alarmed, reader, I had no wish to murder him or even to cause him any bodily harm, but I wanted to get the victory over him, to prove myself cleverer than he was ; to surpass him in talent and energy, to distinguish myself in Mary's eyes. I began to take more pains with my school tasks, my father wondered at my rapid improvement, Sophy encouraged me with her praise, my mother said she

thought I should turn out something respectable yet. They knew not the hidden spring that prompted my actions. As for love of the dry tasks that were set me—pshaw! my own thoughts were far more interesting. It was easy for me with my show of diligence to persuade my father to send me to the same school to which George went; he was so pleased with my progress, he would have done anything I wished him, short of allowing me to go altogether from home, so I had my career for the present pretty well in my own hands. George was reading for a certain mathematical prize which was the object of the ambitious elder boys, and for this I also was determined to compete. I hated mathematics, but I knew Mary took a great interest in the awarding of this prize, and she and George had often talked it over whilst we sat in the garden on a Saturday afternoon. It was once when they were so engaged that I announced my intention of also working for the prize. I was pleased to perceive a cloud arise on George's countenance, whilst Mary jumped up in surprise, and said,—

“What! *you*, Jack? I never should have thought of such a thing!”

“And why not, pray?” said I, somewhat nettled. “I suppose you think I am a fool.”

“Certainly not,” said Mary; “but I never should have thought you would try against George.”

From that moment I was resolved. If I worked myself to a skeleton, if I bent my back double, if

I blinded my eyes with study, that prize I would have, or die for it.

Hogarth, or some clever man, somewhere says, "Tell me not of genius; genius is but another name for energy and perseverance." So I have ever found it, and I am perfectly convinced that whatever I wished for in my past life I might have obtained, if I had only been as energetic and persevering in the pursuit of it as I was in this particular instance. The chances were greatly against me. There were many boys much older than myself; George, though not brilliant, was several years my senior, and possessed a quiet determination and confidence in his own powers that rather alarmed me, in spite of my enthusiastic self-reliance. I worked early and late, I hid my books under my pillow and read by moonlight, I gave up my beloved Spanish for a time, I looked at the rusty old pistols in the lumber-room, and thought to myself "Ah, my old pirate uncle, this is the way you pursued your ends, this is the way in which you chased a prize; how I wish you were here now to give me a lift; but let your mantle fall upon me, and I shall win it yet." Many competitors, completely scared by the energy with which George and I set to work, gave up the attempt in despair of vanquishing such dogged determination, and ranged themselves on either side, backing us up against each other.

"Why, you work as if your life depended upon gaining that stupid old medal," said a merry-faced boy to me one morning as we rushed in troops to

the playground. I remember perfectly well my answer.

"And so it does, Tommy; at least all future success in life; nothing like a fair start, you know."

"Well, *I* like a little fun," said the other, "and would rather have half-a-crown to spend at a fair, and a half-holiday to do it in; I wouldn't be as melancholy as you've been this last month for all your cleverness; and when you've got the medal, what use will it be to you, I should like to know? you can't eat it, drink it, or smoke it."

"What an idea of pleasure," said I, scornfully; "eating, drinking, and smoking. And do you think nothing of honour and glory?"

"Honour and glory be hanged!" continued my friend; "I think much more of breakfast and dinner."

"So I perceive," I replied, as pitying the darkened state of his mind I left him, in order to pass unobserved through the crowd of boys, and regain my school-desk to study in secret. And yet that boy is now first in one of our colonial presidencies, whilst I—alas! alas! so much for early promise! The eventful day drew nigh which was to decide to whom the reward of talent and industry belonged. George and I were left alone in the contest, for the hearts of the others had failed them, and the whole school was in a state of excitement. George was the favourite candidate, and the most popular; he had been in the school a long time, and had endeared himself to all by many acts of kindness, whilst I was comparatively a new-comer, and had

never been popular with anybody. I could perceive that nearly all, masters as well as scholars, wished him success, and looked upon me as an interloper; and this only redoubled my energies. *The morning came*; George's friends shook hands with him as we all crowded the school entrance, and encouraged him with their anticipations. "Never fear, old boy, you'll do it yet"—"You'll not have been such a bookworm for nothing," were the exclamations addressed to him on all sides; whilst I was encouraged by very few, and these for the most part the worst of the school, malcontents, who envied the supremacy of George, and wished for a leader to aid them in subverting it.

* * * *

I had gained it. The prize was in my hand. A dead silence followed; had George won it he would have been cheered till the walls rung again. I had gained it. Here was what I had been so long toiling for; but in the moment of victory I wondered how it was I felt so little satisfaction. I stood with it in my hand, half stupified. George's voice recalled me to consciousness. "Well done, Jack," he said; "you have worked hard for it, and deserve it. I'm glad it was you who won it, and nobody else, as I *was* to lose it. Give him a cheer, lads," he cried out, as we filled the playground. "Hurrah for the last new boy!" The cheer was given long and loud, and then there was another for George, longer and louder still. We were both to go to Little Dale that evening on our way to our respective homes, and relate the result

of our struggle. But now for the present everything seemed forgotten, and football usurped all our energies, and seemed for one half hour the only thing worth living for. George played with as much, even more spirit than usual ; I looked at him and wondered. Had I lost the prize I should probably have sulked the whole of play time, sitting on a log in the timber-yard close by. I knew how he had set his heart on winning it. I knew how his father had promised him a new set of gardening tools if he brought it home. I knew how anxiously his family were looking for his return that evening ; I knew how sure they made of his victory. I had heard him tell Mary this over and over again ; and yet there he was, laughing, joking, running, and apparently a thousand times happier than me. How on earth did he manage it ? I had a great mind to ask him, but I always avoided as much as possible speaking to him. I felt very much annoyed. I had fancied he would be quite crestfallen, and lowered in the opinion of his schoolfellows ; and I perceived that he was as merry and good-tempered as ever, and that the only feeling on the subject manifested by his comrades was extreme disappointment that he was not the successful candidate. When afternoon school broke up, I started off for Little Dale, thinking I should feel more comfortable after I had received Mary's congratulations. Presently I heard clatter, clatter, puff, puff, behind me ; and up ran George.

"I'm coming along with you to Little Dale," said he.

"What, you, George? You're never!"

"Indeed, but I *am*, though; I suppose you think I oughtn't to, because I failed. But I did my best, you know, Jack. I've nothing to be ashamed of in being beat by a clever fellow. Come along."

And he took my arm in his own with a rough good-nature, and forced me to walk at his pace, which was rather faster than accorded with my mooning propensities. I liked to ponder as I went, build castles in the air, and knock off the tops of the hedgerow plants with a stick. Free and merry companionship was objectionable to me. I hated walking with any one except Mary or Sophy. I did not know what to say to George. His generosity made me feel disgusted with myself. I ought to have admired and imitated it; but I could not. I suppose my heart was not large enough. My brain, too, was tired with the tension it had undergone; and when the mind is wearied, the temper is often wayward. I would hardly answer any of my rival's remarks; and I fancy he soon grew tired of my disagreeable companionship, for he left my side, and merrily whistling, seemed occupied in searching for what he called "botanical specimens" in the hedges. We soon reached Little Dale, and the first object we saw was Mary's red shawl at the gate, and her roguish face above.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I can see who has got the prize directly, by the expression of your eyes."

"Who?" we asked both together.

"Why, George, of course," she said. "His are bright and dancing for joy; whilst yours—poor

Jack, never mind ; I dare say you'll get something next time."

"I've got it now, though," said I, triumphantly displaying it before her astonished eyes. "What do you think of that?"

I fancied she looked a little disappointed ; at first she would hardly believe we were not playing her some trick ; but George assured her, on his honour, that he was beaten, and affirmed it as gaily as if he had been telling her a piece of good news. I could not think what made him so much happier than I. He had lost, and I had won ; and yet every one who saw us would have reversed our positions, if he had not been told the true state of the case. Mrs. Dale was soon called to hear the news, and I was heartily congratulated by all. I had expected to hear lamentations over George's ill success ; for I knew, or fancied I knew, him to be the favourite. Was it, then, of so little consequence, this that I had been working for, striving for night and day ? I began to think I had made a mistake, that it was lost labour to try and render George ridiculous ; that come what would, he was sure to make a better figure than *I* could. There was a quiet dignity about him which nothing could destroy, a sort of don't-careishness, which contrasted wonderfully with my own excitement about trifles, and a forgetfulness of self which made my morbid egotism appear the more ridiculous. Mary and her mother seemed to like him all the better for his ill success, and better still for the manner in which he bore it.

I left the merry group, and hastened home to tell my success to sympathizing Sophy. Home! home! how sweet that word still sounds to my ears. No one can tell the blessedness of home until they have lost it. However we may be laughed at, however we may be quizzed, however we may be thwarted by those who love us best, it is only there that true sympathy can be found. How strange it is that this is seldom discovered until too late.

At home I was welcomed with cries of joy from my brothers, with a warm pressure of the hand from my father, a tender embrace from my mother, and that entire, loving, joyous sympathy from Sophy that only the unselfish can give. How happy and how proud I was that evening! I had quite forgotten the motive that urged me to the contest; no one at home knew it. They treated me as one who had worked hard to do credit to the family, and I felt for a while as if I deserved it. I thought to myself, "Aha! Mary and George, you would think rather more of me if you could see me so much considered!" Self! self, again! Miserable self! If I had only spent all this energy in endeavours to conquer my own mind and temper, what might I not have been! But when I had retired to rest, with the great calm face of the moon looking through the skylight at me, and shedding its cold beams over the mysterious picture at the foot of my bed, giving a mocking expression to the strange features of that ghastly-looking lady; when I could hear no sound but

the owls hooting in the distant woods, and the wind moaning through the chimneys, with perhaps a faint snoring sound from sleepers in the rooms beyond, broken by the chiming of the quarters from the old-fashioned clock in the passage which I heard hour after hour, then it was that my old miseries returned ; I thought, " How is all this to end ? when will this battle cease, this battle that I am always waging ? Why was I not born like my brothers, like Sophy ? Why do all these melancholy, mysterious thoughts come to me ? " And then I remembered the stories I had been made to read out of the New Testament, and the idea seized me that I was possessed by a devil ; and I turned round and drenched my pillow with tears. They wondered the next morning what made me look so pale at breakfast, and thought it was over-study.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST SORROW.

AT this time my boyish admiration for Mary and my rivalry with George usurped all the day-dreams which had formerly been devoted to imaginary travels and adventures, but now an event occurred which brought back the love of wandering, and altogether turned the current of my life. Dear, good, gentle Sophy was taken ill. She had been drooping for some time, but no one remarked it, because she exerted herself to go about her accustomed work as usual, and nothing would induce her to complain. Our house was such a busy one that but little attention could be paid to the appearance or fancies of any one particular individual, but at last every one saw how my uncomplaining sister suffered. She grew thinner and paler every day, and seemed utterly unable to go about any active occupation, but she was as sweet-tempered and unselfish as ever, and her only care each day appeared to be to hide from my mother how much she had suffered in the night. She would sit in the porch to watch the sunset, and sometimes ask us to gather some of her favourite flowers. These she would look at with affectionate tenderness, as if she were gazing on some dear friends who were going away for years, and I used

to look at her in silent wonder, and fancy she could speak to them and understand what they whispered in return. She must have had a consciousness of what was coming, for her manner, always so kind, grew still kinder, and even the animals shared in the peculiar fondness with which she spoke to every one. The tenderness of a whole lifetime was concentrated in those few short weeks. However, none of us thought of her dying; it seemed quite natural that she should be there to be taken care of, and it was our pride to amuse her and get her everything she liked. My two rough big brothers, who had no ambition, who looked upon books as instruments of torture, who, *I* thought, had no refinement of feeling, and no ideas beyond haystacks and wheat-ricks, made far better nurses than I did. They would carry her about so gently, and be so quiet when she was asleep, and surpassed me so much in thoughtfulness and consideration, that at times I could hardly imagine them to be the same noisy beings who used to play at pig-market in the orchard. When she fancied herself alone she would sing very softly sometimes; I remember only part of one of her songs; it was about the sea; Sophy had never seen the ocean, but the song was taught her by an old nurse who had been the wife of a fisherman. I never heard any one sing it but these two, and it often haunted me in after days.

As souls float into a harbour of light,
When the voyage of life is done,
The ships sail into the bright
Gold track of the setting sun.

But the sea is never at peace,
And my heart is always sad;
Oh, when will the murmur of ocean cease,
And when will my soul be glad?

The woods are heavy and still,
They are waiting the hand of death,
For Autumn is hiding behind the hill,
And carefully holds his breath.
But the sea is never at peace,
And my heart is always sad;
Oh, when will the murmur of ocean cease,
And when will my soul be glad?

All sorrows at last must end,
Though tears for a time may fall;
For the heavens are over us all, my friend;
The heavens are over us all!
But the sea is never at peace,
And my heart is always sad;
Oh, when will the murmur of ocean cease,
And when will my soul be glad?

I never could make out why she should be so fond of this mournful strain, but I now think that as she felt her end approaching, her thoughts more and more dwelt upon the kind old nurse who was waiting to welcome her to the Land of Peace. I feel tempted to digress into the history of this friend of her childhood, who was the widow of a fisherman, and had seen her husband lose his life; but I will not do so, for my own is sad enough, and were we to write all the sad histories of all the sad people we meet with, the world would be full of mournful books. How the wind howls to-night! and how the old lighthouse shakes! An

irresistible impulse bids me write on, and I feel my time is short.

It is strange how people who occupy themselves much in visions of heroism are often utterly incompetent to fulfil even the simplest duties of active ordinary life. As Sophy got worse I might have been of use in many ways, going on messages and errands which those who were more useful in other respects could not be spared to do; but when I arrived at the consciousness of her danger, as usual I was carried away by the feelings of the moment, and instead of exerting myself as I should have done, I allowed myself to be quite prostrated by grief. I would wander about the fields, utterly reckless of everything but the present sense of desolation. I should not have given way so entirely, perhaps, had I been allowed to be more with Sophy, but her weakness was such that I might only stay a short time in her room each day; and though she often called for me, and seemed to think of me as much as, and sometimes even more than the others, it was thought better to keep me away from her, as my mother continually feared some wild outbreak on my part. So I was left to wander about, unable to attend to my own duties, and often hindering others in the performance of theirs. I used to lean upon the little green garden gate where I had so often talked with Sophy, and give full vent to my misery.

One evening as I was so doing, and wondering, as all do in a first grief, whether it were possible that I should ever be happy again, I saw George

coming down the path leading to our fold. I saw he would go to the back door, and not knowing Sophy was so dangerously ill, would probably make a disturbance at finding it shut. This I might have prevented by going to meet him, but my invincible dislike was not to be overcome, and I could not prevail upon myself to do so. Thus I let my selfishness conquer even my affection for Sophy. I thought of hiding myself from George, for I hated the sight of him; but on second thoughts I decided to remain where I was, hoping he would not see me. I watched him come through the fold, and hoped the big turkey-cock would fly at him; but all animals seemed to have an affection for George, and even that ill-tempered bird let him pass in peace. As I expected, he began battering at the door; and, as I expected, nobody answered. To my horror he began knocking again, for George, like a great many other good-natured people, had the defect of being rather noisy. This was more than I could bear, and I rushed round to him, exclaiming angrily,—

“Can’t you hold your noise, or would you like to break the door open, and rouse the whole place when my sister is dying?”

George gave a sudden start, and his eyes were full of tears.

“Are things so bad as that?” he said. “I had no idea she was so ill. O Jack, how could you think I would do such a thing on purpose?”

I was silent, rather ashamed of my outbreak. Grief makes some people savage. It had that

effect upon me. A few minutes passed, and neither of us spoke. George looked at me, he saw my eyes were red. I could not bear him to look at me ; what business had he to think whether my eyes were red or not ? At last he said,—

“ John, I am very sorry for you.”

“ Thank you,” said I, gruffly.

“ I came down here with some fruit I thought your sister might like.”

“ Thank you,” said I, still more gruffly ; “ we’ve got plenty.”

“ But not of that kind, perhaps,” continued he ; “ they are peaches and grapes.”

“ How did you get them ?” I inquired, utterly heedless of the rudeness of my question, and not knowing what else to say.

“ Why, you don’t suppose I stole them, I should hope,” answered he, with a faint smile, “ or that I picked them up in the road ; but never mind how I got them, as long as your sister is able to eat them.”

Even I could not help being softened by this speech, and as he laid down the little basket on the door-step I felt almost inclined to ask him to come in and rest. But, unfortunately for my intention, he continued,—

“ It was Mary who thought your sister might like them.”

“ So, then,” I thought, “ it was only to oblige Mary that he got the fruit, and walked over all this way with it.”

“ Very kind of her to think of it,” said I ; “ she

has never been near us for I don't know how long."

"Not her fault," returned George; "she has been passionate again, and her mother shut her up for two days, and now she is not allowed to go beyond the orchard."

All satisfactorily accounted for, but I felt very much irritated, and extremely angry at George's being so much better informed than I was. Whenever he mentioned Mary's name the tempter got possession of me. I did not ask him in; I let him go without one kind word; it makes my heart ache now to think of it.

Sophy's days were growing rapidly to a close. They were watched over as we watch the declining days of autumn, when the fall of every leaf creates a melancholy feeling in the heart of the lover of nature, and the late sunsets grow more dear from the knowledge that they will so soon be lost to us. One day she sent for me and begged that we might have a little time together alone. Long, long we sat and hardly spoke a word; it was happiness enough to be together. At last she said,—

"Johnny, I have thought of you very much, and you are the person I most regret leaving, for you do not know how to take care of yourself."

"Then stay with me," I said; "dear, dear Sophy, stay with me, I entreat of you."

She looked very grave and answered, "Do not wish that, for it is not the will of God. But I want to ask you to remember one thing."

"Anything," I said, "anything in the world;

let it be something difficult, that I may do it to please you."

"It is nothing difficult," she said; "it is only this verse, '*Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.*' You are so restless, you will worry my poor mother much if you do not take care; do think of our uncle's fate, and stay quietly on the farm and be a comfort to them all. You are the cleverest, and could do more than any of them if you chose."

"I will, Sophy, I will," I exclaimed, with a burst of sorrow. "I will do anything if you will not go away; but I cannot live here without you, I *cannot.*"

"You can do anything you please if you seek help from Heaven," said Sophy. "I once thought I could not die; I feel now that it will be made easy to me."

I gave way to a passionate burst of weeping; my mother entered at the moment and desired me to withdraw.

"It is a pity, John, you cannot learn to control your feelings," she said, as she closed the door.

I ran downstairs, and, darting into the garden, threw myself at full length on the grass and indulged without control in the bitterness of my despair.

"Nobody cares for me, nobody feels for me," I cried; "and she, the only one who did, is going away."

Such a strange delusion possessed me, I thought that what I said was really true, and that I had

not a friend in the world ; I forgot that I had insulted one, and neglected the others.

Sophy died, and our home was deprived of the presence which had made it so happy. I know not how I passed through that dreadful week. I never could prevail upon myself to enter the room where she lay ; my brothers were often there, but I could not get rid of the superstitious feeling that arose in my mind, and I dreaded to see that face still and cold on which I had so often gazed when full of health and joyousness. A strange sensation possessed me ; I could hardly bear to enter the house, and was never in it more than I could help. I would spend the day in the garden, in the fields when the weather was fine ; and when it rained, in the barn, under the haystacks, anywhere as long as I was not obliged to be in the vicinity I dreaded. No one spoke to me, and I did not wish to be spoken to. I used to think over all the unkind things I had ever said or done to Sophy, how I had undervalued her counsels, how I had neglected her for Mary ; I would sit under the thorn where she used to work, lean over the gate where we last talked together, and mechanically pick her favourite flowers. I could not shake off the melancholy idleness which had crept over me. A heavy weight of dulness seemed to lie upon the farm and all in connexion with it. The milkmaid no longer sang as she brushed the early dew off the meadow path ; the shepherd-boy no longer whistled as he drove the cows home in the evening. Watch, the great sheep-dog, looked wretched ; he missed the

kind and gentle caresses he had been used to, for Sophy never pulled his ears or made him jump as we boys did, but would sit under the trees with her arm round his neck and treat him like a brother. He roamed about slowly, looking for her, and I was too dispirited myself to try and give him any comfort. I fancied even the trees shared in our sorrow, and that the wind made more dismal noises than ever round the old gable ends. The nights were to me horrible. I used to wake up suddenly and fancy my sister was standing by my bedside, and telling me that I must come to her, for she was very ill. My brothers were sleeping calmly, and oh ! how I wondered what it was that made them so quiet and patient when I was so restless under my sorrow.

The day of the funeral came. It was a relief to me when it was over. I hid myself, for I could not bear to follow it, and no notice was taken of my absence. I hid behind a laurel-bush near the house, and watched the black train leaving it. Truly, death must be a fearful thing when so much pains is taken to invest it with mournful trappings. We are told from our youth that it is but an entrance into a better world, the golden gate to which the eyes of all good men are turned, the crown and the accomplishment of all their desires, the angel who ushers them into the presence of a most merciful Father ; if this be so, our coffins should be white, our palls should be purple, and the way along which we are borne should be strewn with flowers. I much doubt if our teachers them-

selves believe all they teach, or they would act differently. I am no fair judge, my life has been a life of crime and misery ; but had I a son, I could follow him gladly, joyfully, to the grave, provided he died with a stainless name ; for what a world of woe this is, and the longer we live in it the more pain we endure. Now, as I am writing, I hear minute guns from some vessel in distress ; how many of those on board have deserved the fate they will probably suffer ? I dare say none. But I am wandering, my brain seems on fire when I think, present events are wild and confused, but the scenes of my boyhood still stand out clearly and distinctly, and I can still remember every circumstance that happened in those days of comparative innocence.

When all were gone to the churchyard, I stole upstairs to Sophy's room ; it was neat and well-arranged, as she loved everything to be. There was her work-basket, the few books she loved, very few, and they were of the simplest kind ; her garden hat hanging up on the peg behind the door, the little clock we had all given her on her birthday ticking away merrily on the mantel-shelf, and the canary-bird singing on its perch by the window. I looked at the piece of sugar in its cage, it was discoloured and had evidently been there some time, I thought *her* hands might have placed it there, and full of this idea, I could not resist the temptation of putting it into my mouth. And then that morbid tenderness of conscience came over me, and I felt as if I had committed a theft,

and burst into an agony of tears. I could not stay longer in that little room, I lifted the birdcage off the nail whereon it hung and carried it to the room where I slept, and vowed that as long as I remained at home it should never leave me.

I sat down and thought what a fool I was to grieve, how that Sophy could never come back again, and how happy she must be now, seeing and knowing all about those beautiful things she used to think so much of. And then again came the thought, "How can she be happy without me?" and I thought it would be very unkind of her if she could. Then I had a sort of wild feeling about writing to her, but what to do with the letter when I had written it? Burn it, and perhaps spirits would carry it through the air; or bury it by the side of her. But a cold, blank feeling soon followed these wild schemes, and I felt indeed that she was lost to me. That touching verse of the old ballad I loved came over and over again to my mind:—

. "Oh, weep no more,
Thy sorrow is in vain,
For violets plucked, the sweetest showers
Will ne'er make grow again."

. But nothing was of any use. I could not console myself in the least. I thought I would go to Mrs. Clarke and get her to talk to me, but I shrunk even from that idea. I thought she would question me and ask me why I did not go with the others, and I should be ashamed to confess my weak superstition and foolish fears. I need not have been afraid, hers was a heart full of indul-

gence, even for the weakest and the worst ; but my mind was in such a state, I could neither bear to be left alone, nor to be with others. I could no longer support the strange tumult of my heart, the room seemed to turn round, my eyes to be full of fire, I leant against the wall for a moment, but I could not stand, I fell heavily, and when my family returned I was found senseless on the floor.

It was many weeks before I recovered from the severe illness my undisciplined feelings occasioned. My mother nursed me tenderly through it ; she who had not recovered from the anxiety and fatigue of our late affliction. When I awoke from the long dream of pain the autumn winds were howling through the woods, and the ground was covered with brown and yellow leaves. My first inquiry was for Sophy, and when I was told she could never come to me again, I felt sorry I had been roused from insensibility. However, there I was, in a fair way to get well, and as I *must* recover, I felt anxious to do so as soon as possible, that I might go and look for her grave. I thought I should feel more peaceful when I had done so. The first time I was allowed to go out, I took care to be alone, and bent my steps towards the churchyard. I felt very weak, and a sickly, wretched feeling came over me. How I longed to tell Sophy everything ; distance made her more precious than ever. It was a melancholy day, the dark clouds were chasing each other across the sky ; it had been raining all night, and the grass was dripping wet. I had

never asked where Sophy was buried, but a secret intuition led me to the right place. I threaded my way through the crowded graves, some enclosed by heavy black railings, some marked by ill-proportioned headstones, some merely grassy mounds, until I came to a fresh-looking heap of earth whereon the grass had only lately begun to grow. There was no stone there yet, but a garland of Michaelmas daisies and a few other autumn flowers lay upon it. I felt sure this was the place. Here then was my poor dear Sophy, here she rested all through the rainy nights whilst I was in my comfortable bed. Overcome by this reflection I lay down and buried my face in the grass. I was roused by a light touch on my shoulder, and started up thinking Sophy had come back again. It was Mrs. Clarke, looking very sorrowful, and very gravely she spoke.

"Johnny, would Sophy like you to be lying there in the wet when you have been so ill?"

"I don't know," was my answer, "and I don't care; I am miserable. I wish to die, and I cannot."

"I'm sure it isn't for want of trying," she replied; "you've done your best to make your father and mother and brothers more unhappy than they are."

"Unhappy about me?" I answered, roughly; "nonsense; nobody can be unhappy about me, nobody cares enough for me."

"You have not seen your parents as I have," continued Mrs. Clarke; "you don't know what suspense and anxiety they have suffered on your ac-

count, you don't know how your brothers have watched over you, and how George has been every day to inquire for you; every one has cared for you, and it is only your own selfishness which makes you think otherwise."

"I wish they had let me alone then," I answered; "I would much rather be lying down there by the side of Sophy."

"And where would your soul have gone?" said Mrs. Clarke; "do you think yourself as good as Sophy? Are you so very sure of going to the same place?"

I had never thought about it; I had imagined that of course Sophy and I should be in the same place, as we cared for each other so much, and I said so.

"Poor boy," said Mrs. Clarke; "and you have yet to learn that all earthly love must be sanctified by heavenly love, or it is worth nothing. I hope it will not be a hard lesson, but I fear—I fear——" and she shook her head and seemed for a few moments lost in thought. At last she said, "I don't know what to do with you; I don't like leaving you here, and yet I suppose you won't move."

"No, indeed," said I, prepared to resist any attempt to make me do so—"nothing shall induce me to go away."

"Yet you know how bad it is for you," she continued. "Look at the clouds coming up; see, it is going to rain."

"I shall stay with Sophy," was my only answer.

"Yet Sophy is not here."

"Where is she, then?" I exclaimed, fiercely. "Mrs. Clarke, I shall go mad if you worry me so;" and turning my back upon her, not all her soft persuasive tones could rouse me from my sulky depression, and not an answer would I give to her gentle entreaties. She left me, and went into the church, which, according to the good rector's wishes, was always left open. I thought she had gone there to look for some one to help to turn me out, perhaps, and this idea strengthened me still more in my obstinate resolution. No such thing; she returned with a hassock from her own seat and put it down by me, saying, "If you *will* stay, you had better sit upon this; but I would much rather you would come to my cottage. Remember, you have always a friend there." And then she left me. I don't know how long I sat there, it was a long, long time, though it seemed short to me; and my thoughts were so intense, that when the church-clock struck, with its heavy clanging sound, it made me jump as if I had never heard it before. The shadows grew longer, the air grew damper, but yet I could not tear myself away. The wind moaned in and out of the large old porch, and I fancied the departed spirits were talking to each other. I listened and tried to make out the voices of all those who had died in the village since I could remember. Then I heard heavy footsteps approach, and a merry whistle grated upon my ears, and recalled my thoughts to realities. It was Robert, the cowman, belonging to the hall, and he was crossing the churchyard on his way to

drive the cows home to be milked. How could he whistle when he saw me? I felt certain he did it on purpose to annoy me. "How hard-hearted everybody is!" I thought: "I am the only person now who cares about poor Sophy." Robert drew nearer; he started when he saw me, ceased his whistle, and crossed over to the other side of the churchyard. It was evident that he had *not* whistled to annoy me, and I felt quite sorry at having a legitimate cause of complaint removed. I heard in the distance the sound of the boys playing cricket on the green, and wondered if I should ever again have spirits to join them. Then I heard the click of the churchyard gate, a light little figure sped up the path, and Mary stood by me.

"O Johnny, are you here all alone?" she said. "O dear Johnny, I am so very, very sorry for you!" and she sat down by me, and we two understood each other in silence. Mary was a good comforter, she did not know how to preach, she could only *feel* with others. The dew fell and the darkness began to close in; I suffered her to lead me gently home.

CHAPTER IX.

DISCONTENT.

THINGS returned to their accustomed course at the farm. My father and mother seemed just the same as ever, and people said they appeared to feel little for the loss of their daughter. But I knew better. Everything was the same outwardly, but a deep change had taken place within. The spirit of light-heartedness no longer reigned over the daily toil, and on half-holidays there were no more games in the orchard. My brothers went to school, and did their work on the farm, and were attentive to my father and mother in their heavy, matter-of-fact manner, but they seemed to have little pleasure in what they did, and went through their daily duties mechanically. My mother's eyes were full of tears when she looked towards the little plot of garden it had been Sophy's delight to cultivate, and she no longer on a fine evening brought her work out into the porch where those two had so often chatted together. My father would stand in the dusk of the evening with his back to the fire and his pipe in his mouth, and puff, puff for an hour together without uttering a word. We hardly ever mentioned her name, and yet we all knew we were thinking only of the same per-

son. This burden of thought became intensely oppressive, and I hardly think it was wise of us to persevere in the vain attempt to conceal our feelings from each other. Some people can endure this ; I could not, though I have been obliged to do so often since, and I am sure I should have died if I had not had Mary to talk to. When the first sharpness of sorrow had blunted I began to find home duller than ever, and the old desires for wandering returned. I went on with my schooling. I did not care to try for another prize though ; having once obtained the victory over George, I had not industry or tenacity of purpose sufficient to induce me to keep up my character for cleverness ; besides, the novelty had worn off, and my ideas were running into another channel. The garret, the rusty pistols, the old Spanish books, possessed redoubled charms in my eyes ; I resumed my secret studies with enthusiasm, but I had a great and secret grief. Smile not, O reader, when I confess it. I mourned that I had not lived in the days of Elizabeth, when I might have sailed to the Spanish Main and become a buccaneer.

Now even, if I was allowed to fulfil my cherished wish and go to sea, the sphere of adventure was small in comparison to what it had been in the days of old. Nothing was left but peaceful merchandise, unless I chose to enter on board a man-of-war ; and that I did not choose, because, in the first place, I should have to conform to strict discipline which I hated, and, in the second place, I must give up the prospect of ever having a ship

of my own. This was my great desire, to be a king on the sea, and like the captain in the celebrated legend of Sir Richard Whittington (of which I believed every word), I thought very likely I might take out a cargo of cats and land them on an island full of rats and mice, or do some other remarkable thing equally profitable to all concerned therein. In the meanwhile, I had to keep my desires locked up within my own bosom, for I dared not resume the subject with my father. He thought no occupation so noble as that of a farmer, and no happiness worthy of comparison with that of a country life.

"This is what we are meant for," he would say; "man was sent into the world to till the earth, and he who tills it best fulfils the will of the Almighty with zeal, and obtains the blessing of Heaven on his labours."

"Yes, sir," I would reply, "by labouring on the soil we certainly fulfil the curse pronounced upon us."

"What's that you say, Jack?" replied he; "I'll trouble you not to use bad language. Curse, indeed! Call that a curse to see wheat and oats and barley growing up all around us, white lambs playing in the fields, and meadows as soft as green velvet? Eat your bread with thankfulness, and be ashamed of yourself, and learn to value a good dairy full of cream and a good fold full of ricks."

"It's all very well talking," I replied one evening, when I was rather more desperate than usual,

"but there is mighty little honour and glory to be got by stopping here all the days of one's life."

"And what have you to do with honour and glory, and such like stuff, I should like to know?" returned my father; "you had much better stick to duty and honesty, they are much more plain-spoken gentlemen, I can tell you, though they don't go about in such fine clothes. I can't think where you got all your rubbishing notions; I'm sure you didn't learn them from me, or from the rector, or from your mother, who has got more brains than half the men in the parish. This comes of teaching boys to read: when I was young hardly any of us could spell, but we all knew how to thrash and plough, and were content to be taught our duty by our mothers and the clergyman. And now, pray, if you had your own way, where would you go on this precious search after honour and glory?"

"I should go to sea, sir," was my answer.

"Humph! and because this wide and beautiful earth is not enough for us, we must invade the property the Almighty has given to the fishes, shut ourselves up in a tarry wooden box, and dance up and down at the mercy of the waves."

"You forget, sir," said I, "that if it had not been for Noah's ship——"

"Noah's fiddlesticks!" irreverently rejoined my father; "what has that got to do with your going to sea?"

"I don't think I ever shall do any good as a farmer, sir."

“More shame for you, then, for throwing away as fine a chance as ever a boy had. Look at George Weston, now, there’s a lad for you! Ready to turn his hand to anything, and always contented; there’s some good in having brains if they turn a man out like that. Thank Heaven I’ve no brains, at least only just enough to keep the farm going, and yet when I was your age hadn’t I a merry life of it? I never bothered my head about things out of my sphere, but played when I played and worked when I worked; all the lads in the village shouted for joy when I came amongst them, and would have done anything in the world for me. And as for honour and glory, when my mother said, ‘You’re a good boy, Sam,’ or when my father told me he did not know how he should get on without me, I felt, I’m sure, ten times prouder than any of those rampaging villains who were always getting their heads broken, or breaking somebody else’s.”

These conversations generally ended in the same manner; I went to bed sulky and disgusted, and by no means convinced. I did not at all see why, because my father chose to think the life of a farmer superior to everything else, that I should be obliged to think so too; in fact, I thought it a reason to the contrary, and prided myself on my independence of judgment. I thought it rather a fine thing for a boy of my age to set himself up in opposition to his natural guardians, but as I have before stated, I did not yet dare seriously to thwart my father’s plans. His great ambition and happi-

ness was to see us all prospering, and all living near him. He was of a kindly and sociable nature, and could not bear the idea of any of us encountering difficulty and danger beyond seas. He was one of those old-fashioned Englishmen who thought a foreigner but one degree removed from a heathen; who steadfastly believed that Frenchmen lived upon frogs, that Italians were always stabbing each other in the back, that Spaniards burnt Englishmen alive as sacrifices to the Virgin Mary whenever they could catch them, and that all the rest of the inhabitants of earth were cannibals. He never read anything but farming books; hated poetry, excepting Bloomfield's "Farmer's Boy," and the "Gentle Shepherd," which he bought once at a sale on account of their titles (but of which, I verily believe, he never read a single word, though he pretended he had), and laughed at me for poring over every old book of travels I could get.

"What's the use of it, Jack?" he would say; "if you want reading, there's your Bible and your Prayer Book. Know them well, and you've all the knowledge an honest man need have, and employment enough for your lifetime too. I'd give all your knowledge for a little contentment now."

"Contentment? bah!" thought I; "contentment is the virtue of a pig."

Of course "men of the world," as they are called, will think my father very prejudiced and ignorant, and I have no doubt he was so; but still he managed to do his duty, went to church twice every Sunday, and enjoyed it, never turned a poor

man from his door, and never lost a friend. Can every "man of the world" say the same for himself? The beginning of winter passed away, and Christmas came. It was a melancholy Christmas to us, and none of us had any heart to put up the holly. A little wreath of it, though, was laid upon Sophy's grave. Winter is sad to sorrowful hearts, but spring is still more so. In winter if all is gloomy and melancholy it cannot be too much so for a mourner, the season seems to sympathize with his mournfulness, and the heavy skies are in unison with his thoughts. But spring, fresh, joyous spring, what has spring to do with thoughts of the departed? I know what a devout Christian would say, and what Miss Clarke said to me. He would say, "Spring is but an emblem of the everlasting renovation of all things, and thus should be doubly welcome to a believer." But hope deferred maketh the heart sick. We look for this renovation, and it comes not; and in the meantime we long and pine after the beloved and lost, until the fresh dew upon the bursting hawthorn seems turned to tears. We wander up the paths where we wandered with the absent, and see all coming to life, all except *one*; and then the songs of the birds seem to mock our misery, and the scent of the flowers torments us because we have no one now for whom to gather them, and the prospect has lost all beauty in our eyes, because we have no one with us who will understand how much we delight in it. How wonderfully dependent we are upon each other! How weak is the vaunted strength of the soul of man!

I felt all this for Sophy as the spring came on, and I had a morbid pleasure in feeling it. Some may not believe a mere child to have been capable of all these deep sensations, but a child is sometimes capable of deeper feelings than a man. Self-interest, the bustle of business, ambition, and a thousand other things, smother them in maturer age, and it is only those who keep a childlike innocence of soul in their riper years,—it is only those who *can* make faithful mourners. But I am digressing; so many thoughts crowd upon me now that I have begun to write after having lived out years of solitude in my weather-beaten ocean home, that I have difficulty in keeping a connected narrative. What matter? This manuscript will probably perish in the waves, or, at any rate, it is unlikely to be read by any who will follow my story to the end. I know not whether I am impelled to write it as a warning to others, or as a punishment to myself. The minute guns have ceased. I have no doubt that foundering ship has perished. I have trimmed the light well, it is all I can do. There is a boat attached to the lighthouse, but what can a powerless old man like me do? I have not strength even to row it ashore to get provisions for myself. And yet! and yet! could I have saved any? O Carlos! Carlos! could I have appeased thee by sacrificing myself? No, I must wait, I know my time will soon come. But I return to that green valley, to those uneventful days, to that peaceful home, to my restless ambition, which disturbed what should have been so happy. My

mother, whose eyes were open to everything, and whose sufferings made her still more watchful, observed my discontent, and without remarking it to me, tried to remove it by keeping my leisure hours fully employed. Her favourite notion was, that industry was a cure for everything, that only the idle were unhappy, that no one had any right to be idle, and, consequently, that no one had any right to be unhappy. My brothers thought me a great fool for my pains, and said so, and I replied to their impertinent speeches with a fool's argument—namely, knocking one down and giving the other a black eye, which left them exactly in the same opinion, and perhaps rather more confirmed in it. Dear, good-natured, quiet brothers, how you would have loved me, had I allowed you to do so! It was wonderful how patiently they bore my vagaries; and they were so careful not to provoke me, it was but seldom I could find an excuse for venting my ill-humour on either of them.

Spring came again; the flowers grew up in Sophy's flower-bed, but they grew wildly, for there was no gentle hand to tend them, for my mother never could bear to go near it, and my brothers had other things to attend to; the church bells rang merrily at Easter-time; the villagers donned their spring garments, and everything looked bright and merry.

The farm alone was cheerless. I was sad and unhappy. One evening I sat on the gate desolately, wondering when the dreary, dreary world would come to an end (for when we are cross and

low-spirited, we always think it is the fault of the world and not of our own selfish disposition), when the good old rector crossed the road on his way from some pastoral visit, and seeing a forlorn-looking object, he turned his steps in my direction.

"Well, Jack," he said, "what are you sitting there for, looking at the hedges; are you watching for the blackberries to grow?"

"No, sir, I was only thinking," I replied, rather cross at being interrupted.

"What about?"

"I am sick of life, sir," said I, in a dreary voice.

The good rector laughed.

"Well, you *are* rather young to begin that sort of thing," he answered; "what kind of death are you going to choose? Shall you hang yourself on the nearest oak-tree, or would you prefer drowning in the farmyard pond?"

"It is no joke to *me*, sir," I replied; "I only know that I am very miserable." And, so saying, I was overcome by my feelings, and burst into a fit of crying.

The rector was astonished and alarmed. "My poor boy! my poor boy!" he said, "I did not mean to distress you. O dear, what shall I do? shall I fetch you some water?" and the tender-hearted old man nearly cried himself.

"Never mind me, sir," I sobbed out; "let me alone; I shall do very well."

But the good old man would not leave me alone, and proposed that we should walk together arm-in-arm towards home. Then, by degrees, he drew

out of me the story of all my sorrows, my castles in the air, my aspirations, my longings for new, strange, and active pursuits, my secret plans, and my secret studies.

The rector put on a very grave face. "Jack," said he, "rolling stones gather no moss."

"I don't want any moss, sir, thank you," said I, my cynical humour returning.

"But I mean that if you go to strange countries you won't be a bit happier than you are here. A contented mind is the only thing to make you happy, and with that you would be happy anywhere."

And then he went on with the old story that I had heard scores of times from everybody else, about happiness being in our own hearts, about the nothingness of outward things, and about its not mattering where we live, as long as we do our duty.

"It's all very well for you to talk, sir," replied I; "you who have everything your own way, you who have chosen a quiet life all of your own free will, and who might go away to-morrow if you chose, who have nobody to control you, and nothing to care for, and nothing to be bothered with, and —"

"Stop, stop," said the rector, "not quite so fast;" and I looked up and saw that though his mouth wore its usual benevolent smile, his eyes were full of tears. "What do you think we were sent into the world for?"

"To do great deeds," I said.

"And what's the use of doing great deeds?" he said.

"To make ourselves famous," I replied.

"Well," continued the rector, "what do you call being famous? Having your name known over a certain space of country, and by a certain number of people, I suppose. How far is this precious fame to extend? Over this parish, or the next, or over the whole county? Or perhaps you would wish to be heard of all over England. Or supposing your name to be known by the whole of the inhabitants of Great Britain, there is still the Continent of Europe; and when you have accomplished that, there is Asia, Africa, and America, all of which neither know you nor your great merits. What will you do then? Or we will go still further, and suppose you to rank as a hero to the whole of the civilized world; you will never be satisfied with that, for there are innumerable savage tribes, to every one of which appertains some bloodthirsty warrior whose reputation in his own narrow barbarian circle exceeds yours tenfold. But say you have won their approbation, that your name is like a star, seen from east to west, from north to south, and chief of all the mighty in this world, what good will it do you up there, where millions of great stars and little stars twinkle every night in glorious confusion? Do you not know," he continued, "that this world is as a pin's head among all the starry multitude, that it is to them as *you* are to the whole race of mankind? Who would care for fame, who would not rather be ashamed of having

wished for such a paltry thing in presence of the wonderful works of God? Believe me, my dear boy, the only way to be great is to be thoroughly conscious of one's own littleness. Then when you are emptied of all pride there is room for the wonderful thought of God's greatness to enter your heart, and you become so absorbed in the contemplation of him, that your own self fades into the nothingness it really is."

I had never heard the rector talk so much before. Even his sermons were not above fifteen minutes long, and couched in the simplest language; he was not given to make long speeches or to give much advice, but this subject seemed unusually to excite him.

"Do think," he continued, "how very short life is; it seems long to you perhaps, for at your age even a year is a long period to look forward to; but I can look back calmly, and see how vain and frivolous all those things are which seemed to me then of paramount importance."

"Then are we to do nothing, sir?" I asked. "Are we to let our best years go by in indolence, merely because we consider nothing on earth worth struggling for?"

"Not at all," replied the rector; "you mistake my meaning entirely. Of course I mean you to work, and to work well; but I entirely disapprove of your aim and your motives. You think your aim is a high one; on the contrary, it is an extremely low one. You think yourself superior to most of the boys with whom you come in contact, but you are in reality greatly inferior."

"How, sir; how?" I asked, my eyes kindling with indignation, for I knew how stupid I considered heavy Benjamin Willis, with his owl-like eyes, and obstinate, shock-headed James Fuller, and many more like them, who seemed to have no ideas beyond seedtime and harvest; and now I, with my manifold attainments, was to be ranked far below these contemptible tillers of the ground.

"I will tell you," said the rector, "if you really wish to know; but then you must not blame me if I give utterance to some unpalatable truths. These boys you look down upon (and amongst them are your own excellent brothers) are fulfilling the duties they were born to, whilst you are not only struggling to avoid yours, but throw hindrances in the way of others, and indulging all kinds of freaks and humours, and showing them by your countenance, if not in your words, how unworthy the attention of a rational being you consider their daily aims and efforts. Ask your own self, is this right?"

"I cannot help my feelings, sir," I replied; "and I cannot help it if my feelings choose to show themselves in my face; I am not a hypocrite."

"But consider," gently replied the rector, "ought you to have those feelings at all? Are we to encourage every thought and feeling that comes into our hearts; at any rate, are we to allow them to become desires? Did you ever hear the old Chinese proverb, 'We should treat our thoughts like guests, and our desires like children'?"

"But suppose," I suggested, "our desires are stronger than ourselves?"

"Fie!" said the rector, "for supposing a thing unworthy of a rational being, and still more unworthy of a Christian. Self-conquest is the real aim of life, and you are like a poor, weak, little seed blown about by the wind of imagination, and incapable of taking root anywhere. I assure you I have more respect for the lowest boy in my school than I have for you. He can only say A, but he says it, whilst you could do a great deal, and—don't do it."

My winning of the prize, my lonely studies, my unusual attainments, all flashed across my mind. Were all these nothing? I asked him this, not in a boastful spirit, but for once with the sincere desire of learning what was right.

"I will reply," he answered, "by asking you a question. What effect have all these things had upon you? Have they made you more kind, more trustful, more pleasant to live with? Has the cultivation of the mind been kept in due balance by the cultivation of the heart? Has the knowledge you have gained helped any one, amused any one, or has it been employed solely for your own ends, or has it been left unemployed altogether?"

I could not give a satisfactory answer to any of these questions. Indeed, if I had spoken truth, I could have said that the more knowledge I had gained, the more disagreeable I had become. I had amused Mary sometimes, certainly, but this more for my own pleasure than for hers; and I am not sure that she was ever any the better for listening to my wild talk. I seemed to be

her bad genius, whilst Mrs. Clarke was her good one.

“Do not mistake me,” continued my kind old friend; “I do not despise mental gifts, I only despise the wrong application of them. You have not lived many years, and have time to retrace your steps. Now let us put it in a matter-of-fact light. [Oh, how I hated that word *matter-of-fact*!] What are your father’s requirements, and what are your attainments? Your father’s highest ambition is to have you to help him on the farm, which is large enough to afford abundant occupation to yourself as well as your brothers. He wishes you to be industrious and respected, to live as your forefathers have done, forming part of England’s pride and wealth, and doing good in your generation. Now, how far have you advanced towards the attainment of these desirable objects?”

“I can write verses, sir.”

“Very cheering and comforting ones,” said the rector, in a tone of irony I seldom heard him use. “Look at these I picked up the other day near the churchyard,” pulling out of his pocket one of the delectable songs I used to beguile my imaginary woes by writing. I copy it here from memory, for it will give the reader some notion of the way I employed my solitary moments:—

SONG OF THE LONELY HEART.

The wind blows shrill o’er the dark blue hill
The song of the sad November,
And down would I lie on the grass to die,
But my spirit would still remember.

Oh, why is the world so cold to me?
And why is my heart so lonely?
I look for a light on the far, far sea,
And gaze on the darkness only.

I have thought, I have sighed, I have sought, I have tried
To cover earth's graves with flowers,
In a moment they die, whilst the winds pass by,
And mock at my dream for hours.

I would leave some token on earth to tell
The tale of my high endeavour,
Like the scroll and the cross in a hermit's cell,
When the hermit is gone for ever!

"'Lonely heart,' indeed!" continued the rector;
"and what right have you to a lonely heart, I
should like to know, with a father and mother,
and two brothers, and a whole parish full of people
besides? 'Down would I lie on the grass to die,'
indeed! Presumptuous rubbish! You're not
good enough to die yet; nor wont be, for a long
time, I can promise you. I don't think this sort
of thing will be of much use to you, or anybody
else. What else can you do?"

"I can read Spanish," I replied, beginning to
feel rather ashamed of myself.

"Very useful, indeed, considering you will prob-
ably live in England all your days."

That, however, I mentally resolved I never
would do.

"Now," said my old friend, "I will tell you how
you may turn all your gifts to advantage. Put
strength and perseverance into everything you do on
the farm; instead of showing you hate it, be deter-
mined to like it; exercise your ingenuity in study-

ing agriculture, and you may, who knows? make some useful discoveries and improvements. Instead of moaning out melancholy ditties which give one the blue devils to hear or to read, employ your inventive faculty in making merry songs which you may all sing together at the farm when the day's work is over, or in concocting some amusing story that may interest the whole family for many a winter's evening; or, if you like it better, compose some hymns or joyful innocent songs about spring, and summer, and autumn, and winter, and put plenty into them about lambs, and cowslips, and daisies, and red-cheeked apples, and Christmas fires, and I will have them taught to the school-children, and you shall hear them sung by merry little voices, and be looked upon by merry little faces with greater admiration than the Greeks ever bestowed upon Sophocles. Or, again, if you like to improve your mind, my library shall be open to you; always provided that before you open a book all other things that are required of you shall be done, and no cause given for complaints at home. You see I have marked out plenty for you to do; why not do it, and be happy?"

"All very well, sir," I replied, "and I am indeed very thankful to you," for my good friend's unaffected kindness had, in spite of my reserve, won its way to my wayward heart; "but the sort of life does not suit me. I feel smothered down here amongst these woods and corn-fields, and something within me tells me I was destined for greater things."

"I see," said the rector, "that you have got hold of the nonsensical cant which I had hoped was yet far enough away from this primitive place. It is a great pity, my dear boy, that young people of the present day think so much about being *great*, and so very little about being *good*. I hope you will not grow old before you are convinced that true greatness consists in doing what we have to do thoroughly, and putting as much heart into our duties as most men put into their pleasures. This is an old truism, but one that seems new to you, and you will never be happy until you see this and act upon it. But now what do you wish to do? What line of life do you propose to take up, suppose your father could be brought to consent to your leaving home?"

"I want to go to sea," I replied, promptly; "I want to rise and become captain of a trading vessel, and see wonderful places, and meet with wonderful adventures."

"Well," replied the rector, "I don't see much more glory in becoming captain of a merchantman than in being a farmer; they are both very honest ways of earning one's living, but both require experience, steadiness, and perseverance. If I saw you working steadily now, I should think you would do well in the way of life you wish for; but he who is unsteady and discontented in one state will probably be just as unsteady and discontented in another. The sun is setting, and there is a cold wind, I am an old man, and subject to the rheumatism; I wish you would walk quietly

home with me, for I suppose such an idle vagabond as you wont be much missed or wanted at home for an hour or two, and then we can talk over matters comfortably ; besides, as you are fond of verses, I will show you some by Southwell that are worth all the trash printed now-a-days."

"And who was Southwell, sir?" I asked.

"Southwell was a Jesuit priest, who was tortured and hanged in the time of Queen Elizabeth. He was a fine fellow, though of a different belief to ours ; but I am not going to check my admiration on that account. The best part of his life was spent contentedly in obscurity, and when he suffered he suffered for his principles, and not for any stupid love of notoriety. By-the-bye, Jack," he continued, laughingly, "if you want to be famous, why don't you take to sheep-stealing, or become a highwayman, and then when you were convicted you might make as fair a show at Tyburn as poor Southwell, only you would not have a good cause as a recommendation, certainly? Fancy your last dying speech and confession cried about in every street of every town in England."

I thought it unkind of the rector to turn the subject into ridicule, and therefore made no answer. We walked on together amicably, however, and I could see from the expression of my friend's countenance that he was thinking deeply. I thought we were going to the rectory, but instead of taking the turn of the road that led to that low-roofed building, he opened a white gate on the left-hand side, and motioned me to accom-

pany him along the corn-fields into which it led. These fields were on higher ground than most of the parish, and commanded a beautiful view. The setting sun lighted up the distant blue hills at the extreme line of a fine expanse of open country, and a refreshing breeze gave me a feeling of joy and vigour to which I had for a long time been a stranger. What a lovely spring evening it was ! and how wonderful it seems to me now, that I had the power of enjoying many, many such pleasures, and wilfully rejected them all. There was that indescribable hum of rural life proceeding from the scattered cottages and busy farmhouses which produces a sensation in the mind far different to that with which one listens to the roar of vast cities ; for the one seems a natural effect of moderate and happy industry, whilst the other appears to be a sign of the overwrought excitement body and mind are alike subjected to when living amongst a struggling, striving crowd. How happy, how healthy everything looked, from a distance ; but on a nearer approach, the poet, the philanthropist, the sentimentalist would have found as much suffering, and sometimes, I regret to add, as much worldliness in comparison, as in more advanced and thickly populated districts.

"Where could you see anything more beautiful than this ?" said the rector, pointing to the home-like, English prospect before us.

"It is a fine view, sir," I replied, "but I have seen this often ; I want something new."

"I will show you something new," said the rector.

We passed out of the corn-fields, and turned down a turf lane which in winter was almost impassable, but which atoned for its uninviting appearance in bad weather by its picturesque beauty in summer. We proceeded along this lane about a quarter of a mile, until we came to a poor but neat-looking cottage, standing in a narrow garden. A few apple-trees behind it brightened the prospect by their red and white blossoms; but altogether it was a melancholy little corner of the world, and I felt thankful I lived among gay and richer scenes. The rector knocked gently at the door. It was opened by a staid-looking, stout, motherly woman, whose face immediately assumed a cheerful aspect as she greeted her visitor.

"How is Jane to-day?" he asked, when the first greetings had been exchanged.

"Better, sir, I am thankful to say," was the answer; "we have been able to move her into the kitchen for a little change, and Mrs. Baines has been so kind as to lend her a sofa, so that she is, one may say, quite comfortable for her."

"Glad to hear it, Mrs. Anson," he replied, as we still lingered outside. "Can she bear a visitor to-day, do you think?"

"O yes, sir! She is always glad to see you; besides, when she is a little better, a visit from any one does her good, for I am forced to be busy most of the day, and she must find the time very long, though indeed she does say she never feels alone."

"Come in, Johnny," whispered the rector to me; "this is what I wanted to show you."

We entered the little kitchen, which to me seemed a poor and miserable place. The floor was paved with bricks, the windows were small, and the lead framework which held the glass panes was bent and dilapidated. A service of pewter rubbed glitteringly bright ornamented the shelf over the only table in the room, and a miserable print of the Crucifixion, bad in drawing and worse in colouring, hung over the bare mantel-shelf. I had often been in the cottages belonging to the labourers on my father's farm, but they were all tolerably well to do, and in comparison with this hovel were perfect palaces. The only chair that bore a semblance of comfort was placed near the window, and on it, propped up by pillows, sat, or rather lay, the invalid mentioned in the foregoing conversation. She would have been handsome had it not been for the traces of suffering impressed on her countenance; she was very pale and thin, and deep black lines beneath her eyes told of sleepless nights and days full of pain. She seemed hardly to notice our entrance, so absorbed was she in watching the little peep of blue sky seen between the boughs of the apple-trees, but when she turned at the sound of the rector's voice, a smile of angelic sweetness came over her sad, worn face, and she said,—

“Thank you for coming, I did not expect such a pleasure this evening; but pleasures are often sent us when we do not expect them.”

Her voice was very weak and faint, but it was that of a person who would have been gentle at

all times, even in the possession of robust health.

"I am not come to read to you or to talk to you much to-day, Jane," said the rector, "but I wished to bring a young friend to see you. He is often sad without knowing why, and I thought you might be able to tell him how foolish it is to be sad when we have such a kind Father to watch over us."

"He is welcome," she answered, kindly taking my hand; "but I can hardly think that one so young can have seen much sorrow. Will you tell me your Christian name?" she said.

"John," I answered, wondering why she put the question, and feeling very much as if I were going to say my Catechism.

"John," she repeated, musingly; "it is a good name, the name of the beloved disciple. Try and be as faithful as he was, and you will be loved like him perhaps. The world is very bright to those who love God. It is bright to me, though I am not able to move; but still I can praise Him; and when I feel inclined to envy those who can do Him active service, I comfort myself with the thought that theirs may be the work of the angels who are sent to minister to the inhabitants of distant worlds, but mine is the work of those who are very near His throne. You can work, and you can praise too; you ought to be a very happy boy."

I did not know what to answer, I only knew that I was no such thing, only I felt too much ashamed to acknowledge it. I stood looking out of the win-

dow, and then watching the movements of a little grey kitten who was rolling an empty reel about the floor; but the rector seemed to expect me to say something, and at last I murmured out, "Are you not very dull here?" She had told me before she was not, but I felt puzzled and bewildered.

"Not often," she answered; "and when I am, it is generally my own fault."

"Your own fault!" I replied; "how can that be? How is it possible for any one to help being dull, buried here in a hole, and with nothing to look at but a kitten and some apple-trees?"

She pointed to a book that lay near her, and I saw it was a Bible. "You can't read all day long," I said.

"No," she answered; "sometimes I cannot read at all; but I can generally remember what I have read, and one verse will often bring a comfort no one can imagine who has not tried it."

"But such a small place to be in!" I said.

"Very true," she answered; "but then you know it is a world to me. You have no idea what beauty I can discover even within these four walls."

I had lost the shyness of a first introduction, and went on questioning and talking with my usual heedlessness and curiosity, not in the least thinking whether it would be agreeable to her or not. But she seemed pleased at having a visitor to entertain, and very willing to gratify me.

"Look here," she said, and pointed to a small box of mignonnette on the window-seat. "You did not see this at all; now this is my forest, my

playground. I watch the flowers until I can almost see them grow, and then I fancy myself a tiny fairy that can wander in and out among the smooth trunks, and look up at the great tall trees with large clustering blossoms, which make them appear all flowers and no leaves. This is childish, perhaps, but it makes me very happy. Then, sometimes a spider or a ladybird will come and perch on the stems and wander about my little country, and I entertain him like a visitor, and try to make no rough movement that would frighten him away. It is something to make even an insect enjoy himself, though it may be only for half a minute. But you must not fancy I am as idle as this always, for sometimes I feel stronger, and then I plait straw and make different little things, but this is not very often, for I get faint and exhausted at the least exertion."

"How do you get on about church?" said I; for I thought, as she seemed such a good person, that would be a welcome subject of conversation. I did not like church much myself, and thought I had quite enough of it on Sundays without talking about it on week-days, but I imagined that with a sick person it was the right thing to converse about.

"Ah! that," she exclaimed, "is my only great trial. I have not been able to go there for years, but the rector is so kind, and hardly ever misses coming to me every Sunday evening, let him be ever so tired."

Our old friend was all this time deeply engaged in conversation with Jane's mother, or she would

call amusement, and with very little interest in the outer world."

I knew what the rector meant. He would not preach, but he inferred a lesson, and meant me to take it to heart. How could I again complain of wanting interest in life? As we drew near to the little rectory the great watch-dog rushed to welcome us, and the old-fashioned housekeeper, who had had the supervision of the small household ever since the rector came into the country, opened the door without any summons.

"Strange," thought I, "that this kind being, who lives only to comfort and help others, should have no one to welcome him but servants and a great dog;" and then, in my usual dreamy manner, I made involuntary mental comparisons between his lot and that of Harris, the rich retired manufacturer, who lived in a great red house as large as half the village, and had one of the sweetest wives and some of the prettiest children in the world, but who made himself and every one around him miserable by his fits of sullenness and *ennui*. But a stumble over a step in the passage brought me down to the present moment, and I accompanied the rector into his comfortable library. It was the abode of a scholar and a man of taste, and everything was arranged in the methodical manner of one who appreciates books at their true value; but it was no luxurious retreat, and no refuge for idleness and self-indulgence. All was for use and not for show, but yet there was more refinement about the arrangements of the room than is usually

expected in a bachelor's apartment. Fresh flowers were placed in clear white vases; pleasant pictures hung upon that part of the wall which was not occupied by books, and it seemed to divide the character of a lady's boudoir with that of a scholar's study. I had never been in this room before, and I felt something of peace and happiness come over my wayward spirit as I looked round upon its quiet and comfortable precincts. I am sure there is something influential even in the atmosphere that surrounds a person who is devoted to holy things, and for a little while I felt almost good. And then, how kind the rector was to me! he took down all the curious and rare books he thought would interest me, and explained to me old black letters, and showed me a copy of Caxton's first book, making me remark the resemblance between the type and the caligraphy of some ancient MSS. he had collected with infinite care and patience. I seemed for the time in a land of enchantment, and gloated over the books with the excitable joy with which I always hailed any new mental occupation; I thought bibliography must be the most delightful taste in the world, and resolved (for the moment) to give up my whole life to it.

"But stay," said the rector, as I was asking question after question, "I must not forget to show you the verses I was speaking about. They say what I wanted to express to you in much better words than any I should use." And drawing down an old-fashioned, dusty-looking folio from one

of the upper shelves, he read me the following lines :—

CONTENT AND RICH.

I dwell in Grace's Court,
Enriched with Virtue's rights ;
Faith guides my wit, Love leads my will,
Hope all my mind delights.

In lowly vales I mount
To pleasure's highest pitch ;
My silly shroud true honour brings,
My poor estate to 'rich.

My conscience is my crown,
Contented thoughts my rest ;
My heart is happy in itself,
My bliss is in my breast.

Enough I reckon wealth ;
A mean the surest lot,
That lies too high for base contempt,
Too low for envy's shot.

My wishes are but few,
All easy to fulfil—
I make the limits of my power
The bounds unto my will.

I have no hope but one,
Which is of heavenly reign ;
Effects attend, or not desire,
All lower hopes refrain.

I feel no care of coin,
Well-doing is my wealth ;
My mind to me an empire is,
While grace affordeth health.

I clip high climbing thoughts,
The wings of swelling pride ;
Their fall is worst that from the height
Of greatest honours slide.

Sith sails of largest size
The storm doth soonest tear,
I bear so low and small a sail
As freeth me from fear.

I wrestle not with rage
While fury's flame doth burn ;
It is in vain to stop the streams
Until the tide doth turn.

But when the flame is out
And ebbing wrath doth end,
I turn a late enlargèd foe
Into a quiet friend.

And taught with often proof,
A temper'd calm I find
To be most solace to itself,
Best cure for angry mind.

Spare diet is my fare,
My clothes more fit than fine ;
I know I feed and clothe a foe
That, pampered, would repine.

I envy not their hap
Whom favour doth advance ;
I take no pleasure in their pain
That have less happy chance.

To rise by others' fall
I deem a losing gain ;
All states with others' ruins built,
To ruin run amain.

No chance of Fortune's calms
Can cast my comforts down ;
When Fortune smiles I smile to see
How quickly she will frown.

And when in froward mood
She proves an angry foe,
Small gain I found to let her come,
Less loss to let her go.

"There," said the rector, "what do you think of those lines?"

I was pleased with them, and I said so. I should have been pleased with anything at that moment, for I was in the humour to be pleased. It was very easy to make a good impression upon me; but the misfortune was, that the impression only lasted until the next idea came into my mind. I seemed to be only capable of taking in one notion at a time; and even now I consider that peculiarity almost more a misfortune than a fault. The kind old man continued,—

"I will copy these lines for you. Perhaps you will value them more in my handwriting, and may be induced to shape your life accordingly. At any rate, they will remind you of me when I am gone. And now, remember, all these books are at your service, and you may make use of this room whenever you please; only on this condition—that you first fulfil everything that is required of you at home. I want mental cultivation to make you happy there; and, depend upon it, you won't be a worse farmer for being able to enjoy the society of the good and great of all ages. Recol-

lect Cincinnatus and his plough," he continued, smiling; "*he* did not want to get above his station."

I laughed at this allusion to my late classical studies, and mentally resolved to follow my friend's advice. It was getting late, and I gratefully bade him farewell, and started on my short walk home, and so engrossed was my mind with the subject of our conversation that I even forgot to be frightened as I passed the churchyard, though a large white owl flew out of a tree close to me, and hooted in a fearful manner. Some persons may wonder the rector should have taken so much trouble about the fancies of an insignificant boy; but he was a worthy follower of that Great Being who condescended to go seven miles out of His way to instruct two ignorant men. I made many good resolutions during that walk home, and decided to give up day-dreams; to turn all my attention to becoming a useful member of society; to be more careful of such opportunities of doing good as fell in my way; and so confident was I in my own abilities that I thought I could do anything I chose. The old farmhouse looked black in the shadows of the night, and the moon was rising up behind the tall chimneys as I returned to my comfortable home, and heard the well-known voices within. As I entered there was a general outcry of questions; where had I been? what had I been doing? Mary and her mother had been drinking tea there, and I had missed them; I had been wanted to help at something or other, and of

course I had got out of the way. They had had a most glorious game of ball after the work was over, and I had lost the enjoyment, &c. To all this I only replied that I had been with the rector, and this immediately silenced all complaints. They knew I could get no harm from *him*. Jane's gentle face haunted my sleep that night, and I fancied I could still hear her voice softly whispering, "The world is very bright to those who love God."

CHAPTER X.

THE RECTORY.

My father held peculiar opinions. He was rich enough to send his sons to college, and set up for a gentleman ; but he did not do this, for he held it to be desirable that a man should keep in that station to which he was born. He used to say his ancestors had all been yeomen, and therefore he would be a yeoman also. He was not better than his father had been, and he did not see why he should expect to mount higher in the world. He would have scorned the idea of writing Esq. after his name, though many who had not half his wealth did so ; and he never thought of driving anything better than a cart. My mother always went to market mounted on a shining black cart-horse, of heavy and muscular proportions, and a trot that used to make the road shake under him whenever he was allowed to indulge in such a violent proceeding ; but his usual pace was a dignified walk, which exactly suited the character of our house and family. Anything like show or gentility was studiously avoided in our household, all was plain, good, and old-fashioned ; master and mistress and all the family dined at the same large table with the farm-servants ; the kitchen was the

common room, and the whole household spent their evenings together. I verily believe that if my grandfather had been a chimney-sweep, my father would have had the greatest pride in being a chimney-sweep also, and thought it the finest profession in the world. With these ideas it will be easily understood how it was that he had no ambition for his sons. He would have been much pleased had he heard the rector's advice to me, and he *was* pleased at seeing the results thereof, though he did not know whence they proceeded. I was more industrious, and less unsettled after this conversation, and did many things I had before despised. The hope of some more pleasant evenings at the rectory urged me on, and there was a mystery about its inhabitant which I was very anxious to penetrate. I had made a little story about him in my own mind, and I was extremely anxious to discover whether the reality coincided with my imagination. It was of no use to ask my father, for I was certain his reply would be a gentle request to attend to my own business; but I resolved to watch for an opportunity and find it all out from the rector himself. I had one extraordinary property, that of extracting confidence even from those twice or three times as old as myself. I have never been able to understand what there was in my character which induced people to confide their secret histories to me in the way they did; but there was a nameless something that attracted confidence even when I was very young. Perhaps it was the perfect openness and

unreserve with which I spoke of all my own concerns; perhaps the pleasure of finding a good listener, for a good listener I certainly was; and I was so much interested in other people's histories that I would willingly have stopped every beggar on the road and beguiled him into telling me the adventures of a lifetime. I do not think this propensity was exactly curiosity, it was more a love for the study of character, and the analysing of motives. Bad and faithless I was in many respects, but these confidences were never abused. My father had given me the opportunity of a good education, and though I did not learn much more than I liked, my mind was sufficiently cultivated to enable me to appreciate the mental treasures laid open to me by the rector's kindness. I knew I could not get to the rectory until I had done all that was required of me at the farm, and therefore I was very industrious. Sometimes, when I arrived, the rector was absent on an errand of mercy or business; but there was a standing order for my admittance, and I was always welcomed both by the vigilant housekeeper and the fierce watch-dog. Sometimes he was there, sitting by the window, and greeting me almost before I entered the gate; and then he would reach down two books from the shelf, and, taking one himself, would hand the other to me, saying, "Now let us study together," more for the sake of giving me an example of industry than anything else; for I am quite sure he knew almost everything. I often thought how strange

it was that a man of his acquirements should choose to bury himself in an obscure village when he might be amongst the most distinguished of the land ; but he seemed to have no cares except those of the poor, and no wishes except to see all around him better and happier. There we would sit, both engrossed in our books, not a sound disturbing the stillness except the tick-tick of the old-fashioned clock that stood above the mantel-piece, or the hooting of the owls in the distant wood ; and, after an hour's quiet occupation, I would silently replace the book in the corner assigned to it, and, after wishing the rector good night, start on my way home, carrying back as much of my reading as I could remember, to be related to Mary during our next walk. Mary was rather jealous of my going so much to the rectory, and much preferred my visiting Miss Clarke, which was a pleasure she also could enjoy ; but as my intimate acquaintance with the rector was of later date than my friendship for Miss Clarke, of course it took precedence in a mind like mine, where novelty was everything. Besides, I knew all about Miss Clarke, and I had not yet heard the rector's history. So the good old lady was left chiefly to the attentions of Mary, and exercised over her such a gentle and saintly influence that the passions gradually ceased, and imprisonment in the loft was a thing seldom heard of. Mary's mother was not at all surprised at the change that was taking place in her daughter's character, for she ascribed it entirely to her own excellent and

severe discipline ; and when the neighbours consulted her upon the management of their refractory children, always strongly recommended solitary confinement as the next best thing to an unlimited use of the birch, and triumphantly pointed to her own daughter as an irrefragable proof of the complete success of her educational system.

Mary and I still had pleasant walks together now and then, and as few of our thoughts were concealed from each other, I confided to her my great desire to learn the rector's history. But, to my astonishment, I found that she was not nearly so inquisitive as I was. Miss Clarke had by some wonderful means managed to overcome the propensity to meddle which *she*, Mary, had shared in common with myself, and, instead of sympathizing in my wishes, I was rather provoked to find she strongly advised me to relinquish my object, and to be contented with what was told me, instead of asking questions.

"Miss Clarke says, Johnny," she continued, "that it is only vacant minds who have time to trouble themselves about other people's affairs."

"Miss Clarke is always saying something disagreeable," I replied ; "it is a great pity she can't let you alone ; you were so much pleasanter before she took you in hand, and now you are always moralizing and spoiling one's pleasure."

A little while before Mary would have flown into a rage at my contemptuous allusion to her model of excellence ; but she had learnt to be calmer, and quietly replied,—

"But what good would it do you to know everything you want to know?"

"I don't know," was my answer, "except that I choose it, and I mean to do everything I choose all my life, if I can; that is to say, everything which *you* don't object to, dear Mary, for I would not tease you for the world."

This saving clause kept us from a dispute, for our intercourse still possessed the peppery element of former times.

"Miss Clarke says," continued Mary, "that people who do everything they choose, are the most unfortunate people on earth, and, in fact, the only people who are really miserable."

"You make *me* really miserable," I said, impatiently; "you never say a single thing now without beginning it with 'Miss Clarke says.' You are losing all originality."

"I would rather be good and a copy, than original and wicked," said Mary.

"Then *I* would not," was my contradictory answer.

Notwithstanding my dislike to anybody's opinions being thought more of by Mary than my own, I would much rather hear her quote Miss Clarke than George. I had a perfect horror of George gaining influence over her. I did not see very much of him now. He was growing up into a young man, had left school, and was busily employed in the office of Mr. Compass, the best surveyor in the country. Every one spoke well of him, and I often heard his mathematical genius

praised by many people who were well qualified to judge. He was much missed on his father's farm ; but it was in compliance with his parents' wishes that he entered on his present business, for which they judged him so well fitted. I heard of his proficiency with contempt. I knew I had vanquished him once, though younger than he ; and I thought, if I gave my mind to it, I could make a much better surveyor ; but such an occupation was much too tame and spiritless for me. In the mean time my love for Mary still continued, though the flame burnt less violently, and, perhaps, would have diminished yet more had I not known (how, I can hardly tell) that George's affections were centred upon her. The temptation of being his rival was too strong for me ; and my intentions were confirmed by a conversation I overheard between my mother and one of our neighbours who was spending the evening with her. They were loud in praise of my aversion ; and after saying they hoped he would settle down in our country, for he would be quite a guide and example to all the young men in it, Mrs. Fane (for that was the name of my mother's friend) said,—

“Well, the next thing will be to find a good wife for him ; but I don't know any one who is worthy of him.”

“I do,” said my mother ; “Mary Alton would be just the very girl in a few years. She has wonderfully improved of late, and has very nice manners.”

“True,” replied her friend ; “and now I do re-

member there always used to be a liking between them ; who knows how it might end ? One thing I am very sure of, that if George likes Mary, she must like him, for in my opinion nobody can come up to him."

"Indeed, Mrs. Fane," thought I to myself, "that remains to be proved." But the conversation still continued, and I still listened, though apparently quietly poring over the pages of a dictionary.

"It is of little use for us to settle it now, though," said my mother, "for George's father has a particular objection to his son's marrying very young, and it will be some years before Mary could think of such a thing. Even if they cared for each other now, they would hardly remain in the same mind for such a length of time."

"Well, we shall see, we shall see," said our visitor ; "they say some marriages are made in heaven, and this may be one of them."

And so the conversation was changed, and topics discussed which I had no further interest in listening to. I had made up my mind ; I was determined to thwart George in his plans for the future, if, indeed, he had any plans, and it should be the object of my life to spoil the happiness of his. I had before disliked George, because I loved Mary ; now I loved Mary, because I disliked George. I know not which was the greatest, the wickedness or the folly of this proceeding. It proved the vanity of my nature, for I thought, "Why should all the gossips of the parish be so infatuated about George ? Why should he be set down at once as

the future husband of the most attractive girl in the country, whilst I was entirely overlooked, and not considered worth mentioning?" How stupid I was not to see that people who think so much of themselves are apt to be undervalued by others! If I had been rated at my own valuation I should have been in no lack of admirers, certainly. But it was of no use thinking much about this subject at present, as it was too early to take any steps concerning it; I therefore contented myself with keeping a watch over Mary, and ascertaining whether George was as intimate at Little Dale as formerly, and to my great delight I found that his occupations prevented his paying such continual visits, though, when he did come, he was always welcomed as warmly as ever. So was I also, and I could not find out which Mary preferred as a friend; she was yet too young to think of lovers. I did not intend to do wrong; I merely, as I have done all my life, followed the inclination of the moment. I always puzzled myself when I thought much about right and wrong; what seemed to other people wrong often appeared to me to be right, and I was too proud to be governed by advice. It was only a practical lesson, such as had lately been given me by the good rector, that had any effect upon me, and that was only for a short time. I continued for a few weeks steadily pursuing the line of life the good man had marked out for me, and to anybody else it would doubtless have seemed a very happy one; but, alas! alas! I began, as usual, to tire of it. My mind was still intent upon finding

out the rector's antecedents, and my curiosity was still more excited by various little incidents I observed. I never could help remarking how particular he was in the arrangement of the flowers in his study; he always took this employment upon himself, and nobody ventured to interfere with it. Then there were certain portfolios which were never touched or even dusted except by himself, and then he would sigh so heavily when he looked at them, I was certain there was some history attached to them—some history of sentiment or feeling such as I was always delighted to hear. I ventured to go close to them one day when he was out of the room, but they were tied up with ribbon, and fear of discovery prevented me from examining them further. There were also several books in a remote corner of the shelf, and in the cover of each was written, in his own handwriting, "Louisa, from —," and then followed his own initials. Who could Louisa be? There were other things, too, which puzzled me. In all the rector's deeper books, such as lexicons and grammars, ethics or rhetoric, under his own name another name was always written. This name was "Basil Churton." The hand was bold and round, much larger than the rector's; and I would pore over these characters, and try to learn the history of the writer from the great black, rugged letters. But how to obtain the object of my desire? My usual way was to go to the point and ask a straightforward question; but I had more respect for the rector than for anybody else, though veneration was by no means one

of my attributes, and I did not like to treat him as I should have treated most people. But one day my wishes were accomplished more easily than I could have hoped for. One evening I had been poring over my book for about half-an-hour, and after trying in vain to keep my attention to it, had got what is generally termed "the fidgets," and gave vent to my weariness in an unintentional yawn, which made my kind friend look up from his book.

"You are tired, John," he said; "come and take a turn in the garden; restless beings like you require a little change; you have been still for half-an-hour, and that is almost too much to expect from any human being," and laughing, he roused me from my comfortable seat, and we both went into the little garden.

We continued for some time without speaking; and, as we were pacing up and down, I accidentally trod upon a glowworm. An angry exclamation escaped from the lips of the rector, the first I had ever heard him use. I turned round in astonishment. He recollected himself instantly, and said,—

"I did not mean to be unkind, but I had a friend once who was very fond of these little creatures; she is gone, and I cannot bear anything to be destroyed that she cared for."

"Was her name Louisa?" asked I, forgetful of all discretion.

"Her name *is* Louisa," said he, correcting me; "but how did you know that?"

"Her name is written in all the books near the corner of the third shelf on the right-hand side," said I, scrupulously exact in my description. And then I explained how I had often longed to know all about her, and how I had pondered over her name and that of Basil Churton, and wondered who they were, and how I had wished to know what the rector's early life had been like.

He was not angry when he heard all this; and when I half apologized for my curiosity, and said I hoped it was not wrong, he said he thought it very natural, and hoped I might never do anything worse.

"If my story can afford you any pleasure," he continued, "you are welcome to hear it; it is selfish to shrink from mentioning one's affairs, if telling them can be of use to another; besides, there are very few now who care to hear an old man's history, and those who do shall certainly have the satisfaction."

CHAPTER XI

ANOTHER LOVE STORY.

My early home was very far away. I had kind, good parents, and the sweetest sister in the world. We were very happy in my younger days; our family was small, but the most entire confidence bound us four together. Not one of us cared for a pleasure the others could not share, and we were known amongst our neighbours by the name of "the happy family." My father had been a soldier, and done good service to his country, and he would have liked me to choose the army as my profession; but my thoughts and wishes all centred upon the care of souls, and my highest ambition was to take orders. You know how fond I am of books; I was just the same then; and my father seeing how great a turn I had for study, resolved that I should go to college, and follow the bent of my inclinations. He was confirmed in his determination by my mother, who much wished me to enter upon a peaceful calling; and my sister encouraged all my aspirations, and thought no occupation so high and holy as the one I had set my heart upon. The only drawback to my happiness was the necessity of leaving home; but this trial, though painful, was mitigated by the consciousness that I was acting with the full consent and approbation of all those I loved.

I will not dwell upon my parting from home, but pass on to the time when I had fully entered upon my college career. It was of no difficulty to me to avoid the temptations of dissipation, for my tastes all lay in the direction of quiet and intellectual employment, and a man can almost always find companions in whatever course he marks out for himself. It was easy, therefore, for me to avoid those whose habits I disapproved, and to associate with the most reading set of a college famous for its reading men. My great ambition was to take honours, and I fear at all times I set too much value upon intellectual exertion and intellectual attainments, without stopping to inquire what was the motive and aim of all the longing pursuit after knowledge I both witnessed and shared in. I did not scrutinize my own motives any more than those of others ; but, had I done so, I should have found, I fear, that the immortal part of me had little or no share in the work I so diligently persevered in. Like you, I wished to be a great man, but, unlike you, I steadfastly followed the path that led to my object, and was determined to return to my family with a name that should justify their confidence in my abilities. A good deal of pride was mixed up with this resolve, and I fancied myself formed to become one of the future luminaries of the Church. A wonderful future glittered before my eyes ; and I already in imagination saw my own name shining in company with the starry ones of Taylor, Andrews, Ken, and Butler. Perhaps you will say this was no such unholy ambition, nor would

it have been, if the foundation had been the love of God. But I believe self-love had more to do with it. At this time the sharer of all my studies and of all my pleasures was one of whom I shall always retain the tenderest recollection. His name was Basil Churton. You saw it written in all my books; *our* books they were then, for all things we had were in common. We were alike, yet very different: he was physically strong and athletic, I was weaker and of sedentary habits; he was of an excitable and easily irritated temperament, I, on the contrary, was calm and equable in disposition. He was subject to fiery passions on the slightest provocation, yet of a generous and forgiving nature, and so capable of inspiring affection that, notwithstanding his many faults, he never lost a friend. The strongest ties bound us to each other. We were like brothers, and in each other were sure of finding the deepest sympathy for every scheme which was concocted by the busy brains of either. We were never apart; always studied in each other's rooms, and walked or boated together. Our Ambition was the same. He was determined to take the very highest honours the University could bestow. I never doubted his success. I rated his talents far above my own, and I thought I too should one day have a fair chance. How often did we talk together of the future, and of the brilliant career we were each to pursue! He would say to me,—

“ Philip, if I fail, I shall die. There must be no half success, it is all or nothing with me.”

Then his eyes would flash with enthusiasm, and his strong muscular form seemed to get taller and taller until I was almost frightened by his eagerness, and would look at him with wonder. Meantime he seemed to be able to do everything he wished. No problem was too hard for him, no question too abstruse, and the college authorities looked upon him as one marked out to do them honour. I wonder the idea never entered my mind that he was overstraining his intellect ; but I had such confidence in his superior sense and judgment, for he was several years my senior, that I never ventured to interfere. I noticed sometimes that he would get terribly excited when there was apparently no occasion for it, and that he would often in the evening ramble on in wild, rattling talk, which few besides myself could have understood ; but at his studies this excitability disappeared, he was totally absorbed in the matter in hand, and seemed to have no thought or care except for the present moment ; and as I watched the amazing facility with which all difficulties were conquered by his wonderfully powerful mind, I was lost in admiration at the universality of his genius, and thought to myself that if Basil Churton did not succeed in his endeavours, all human calculation would be at fault. He was not by any means so confident. There were several steady, rising scholars who also were putting forth all their energies, and amongst them some peculiarly gifted minds were numbered. One of Basil's idiosyncrasies was the habit of thinking everybody cleverer than himself ; and this idea so

thoroughly possessed his mind, that I am sure he worked twice as hard as he need have done.

As the period of the examination drew near, he allowed himself hardly any recreation, and only just food and sleep enough to enable him to go through the daily and nightly labour he allotted himself. He grew visibly thinner and paler every day ; more nervous, more querulous, and subject to fits of depression which were only overcome in his hours of study. It was only when these hours were ended that he felt the fatigue of continual mental exertion ; when the excitement was over, his weakness showed itself. I mourned over this, but I did not know what to do, for a whisper of relinquishing or even postponing his high designs would have drawn down upon me one of those fits of anger which were always so bitterly repented of. There was nothing for it but to watch, and let things take their chance. For myself I was not anxious, for I was not to go up that term. I shall never forget the days of examination. Basil went through it wonderfully, and I felt certain his name would stand the highest on the list. But we had to wait some time before the list came out. During that interval we were separated, and Basil had to bear his suspense alone. It must have been agonizing, from what happened afterwards. I was returning to college after two or three days' unavoidable absence ; a knot of undergraduates were assembled in the quadrangle, and as I passed them I heard them talking of the successful aspirants, and the words "Senior Wrangler," "Basil

Churton," reached my ears. I had, instead of proceeding straight home (as the near approach of the vacation would have warranted me in doing), returned on purpose to learn more quickly the result of the examination, so I rushed up to them, and, without waiting to interchange greetings, exclaimed,

"Is it really true? Is Basil Churton senior wrangler?"

"Of course he is," they all said.

"Where is he? Is he not glad?" I asked.

"He doesn't know it," they said; "and nobody can get in to tell him. He has barricaded his door, and we don't know what's come to him."

"Let me go and tell him," I shouted; "he will be overjoyed."

"Oh, pooh!" said the others, "he knows it just as well as we do; he's only pretending. He always *did* pretend he was more stupid than anybody else, though he must have known he could beat us all. I am sure the dons told him enough about his abilities, so it won't be their fault if he doesn't rate himself pretty high."

I was tired of this talk, and darted off to my friend's room, determined to be the first to offer my congratulations. I bounded up the stairs and hammered at the door. It was long before it was opened, and when I was at last admitted I beheld the wreck of my friend.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "what is the matter with you? why do you look so ghostly when you have succeeded in all your efforts? you are first in everything!"

He seemed not to be able to comprehend what I was saying, but sunk down wearily to his books again, and said, "It is very unkind of you, Philip, to come and disturb me in this manner, when I have been working so hard to get ready for the examination. I was getting on so well, and now all my ideas seem gone out of my head," and he put his hand wearily to his head.

"How can you talk so?" I said; "the examination is over long ago; what are you thinking of?"

"No, it is not," he said; "it is coming on to-morrow, and my mother will be so sorry if I fail. Look here, I had this letter from her this morning, and she does so hope I shall succeed; she says she is certain of it."

I looked at the letter he held out to me, but to my horror saw it was only a piece of crumpled paper covered with algebraic calculations. I saw that my poor friend's intellect had given way. I was struck speechless with terror.

"I fear my memory is going," he continued, in an odd, rambling way; "I studied all this question out this morning, and got up the subject thoroughly, but I have forgotten it, now; and oh, Philip, Philip! what am I to do, for I have so little time, and the examination comes on to-morrow?" And then tears came out of his large melancholy eyes, and fell in great drops upon his papers.

I could not comfort him. One idea possessed his mind; that the examination was coming on the next day, and that he should not be ready for it. No argument, no persuasion, no reasoning

could convince him to the contrary. This was the first heavy affliction I had ever had to bear, and I hardly know how I lived through it. To see this fine mind, my example and my guide, thus suddenly struck down to a state of childish imbecility, was a calamity that nearly crushed me. I will not dwell upon the miserable scenes I had to go through. Of course all necessary steps were taken, and an immediate removal of the poor sufferer was decided upon. It was hoped that the quiet of his home might partially restore his reason. But even this hope failed ; he never recovered, and never rallied from the hopeless state of melancholy I had found him in on that eventful morning. He was always moaning over the decay of his memory, and always busily engaged in preparing for the examination which, he said, "was coming on to-morrow." I saw him once again, but he had quite forgotten me ; and some months afterwards he died, and everybody said it was a happy release. O, Johnny ! you sometimes wonder why I am so unenthusiastic about mere mental superiority ; but when I see how soon the finest powers decay, and how miserably the mind perishes when it strives to grasp subjects which lie one hair's breadth beyond its reach, instead of falling down and worshipping the boasted genius of man, I tremble as I think of his presumptuous wishes, and I look up to the Almighty Giver of all good gifts, and breathe the prayer, "Keep us from all pride, and let us have no aim but that of serving Thee."

And now you will not wonder why those books

are amongst my treasures ; Basil's name is in them all, and each dark, heavy-looking tome reminds me of hours of happy intercourse with one who has long been numbered with the dead. But I can never forget him, though I perhaps am the only being who dwells with loving remembrance upon those bygone days. How soon one man is forgotten ! Though he may be the bravest, noblest, most learned of his generation, let the most deplorable catastrophe befall him, and it will not be lamented more than a few days by the world in general. And yet it is for this forgetful world that we labour, and strive, and struggle, ruining our souls in order to gain one breath of its applause, whilst He, by whom every hair of our head is numbered, stretches forth His hands to us in vain, and almost implores us to come to Him and be saved. These were the thoughts that crowded upon me after poor Basil's calamity, and I felt how vain and worthless to him all he had struggled for had become. My heart sickened at the thought of my once cherished studies ; college life became distasteful to me ; my old haunts were robbed of all their delightful associations. I was tempted to give up my scheme of life entirely, and by applying to something new avoid the dreadful necessity of pursuing alone the path I and my friend had so cheerfully wandered along together. But this would have been weak and wrong. I had begun my career from pleasure ; I must now continue it from duty. I had no right to give up my calling, because circumstances had rendered it dis-

agreeable to me. But I resolved to change entirely my motives of action. Instead of allowing personal ambition to sway my conduct, I tried to crush every feeling of the kind, and to have no motive dominant within me but that of the love of God. You must not fancy I succeeded all at once in bending my feelings and my desires to the dictates of reason and conscience; old habits are not so easily overcome, and it was long before I arrived at a calm and settled state of mind. I resolved to give up the vain desire of pre-eminence, to struggle no longer to obtain first-class honours, for I felt that though in all probability I should succeed in gaining them, I might risk a portion of that health and strength I was now anxious to devote to the service of the poor and distressed. I took my degree creditably, and with that I was satisfied. My parents were also satisfied; it is true they had expected something more, and I had not told them of the stage of feeling through which I had passed after poor Basil's calamity; but my father was one of those old-fashioned military characters who think courage and truth of more importance to a man than all the learning in the world, and so long as I possessed these qualifications he was little likely to press other considerations upon me. I was ordained, and after serving due time as a curate, I was presented to this living by an old friend of my father. And then the great sorrow of my life occurred. I could not even now trust myself to speak of it, had not years and years of patient suf-

fering gradually deadened the sharp pain which then pierced through my heart. Before taking possession of my new home, I went on a visit to one of my college friends, who had often wished to introduce me to his parents. The family consisted of many sons and daughters; they were all cheerful and amiable, and I thought that next to my own I had never seen such a happy household. It was not long before one of my friend's sisters made a deep impression on my heart. Her name is the name you saw written in those books. I do not know how to describe her, for she seemed to me perfect, and how can I describe perfection? So gentle, so graceful, so enthusiastic in her estimation of everything spiritual, so kind to all around her, so anxious to help in all good works, so entirely unconscious of her own attractions—where shall I find words to convey to another the love and veneration wherewith I regarded her? Many and long were the conversations we had together, and every day drew us closer together by the ties of a sympathy we could not conceal from ourselves or from others. At last the full tide of my feelings poured forth, and to my unutterable joy I found they were reciprocated. No difficulties were raised by Louisa's parents, and it was agreed that the marriage should take place as soon as the arrangements could be completed, and that we should settle at once in our new home, and begin the duties we both looked forward to as an everlasting source of interest. I say "everlasting," for we both forgot how short-lived human happiness

must always be, and we built castles in the air with reckless prodigality, never doubting but what all our bright visions would be realized. It was a splendid summer, and the house was full of people. Parties of pleasure were formed every day, and Louisa and I always contrived to separate from the others and pursue a quiet ramble by ourselves. She was a good artist, and no amusement gave her so much pleasure as sketching. Those portfolios in my study are full of her drawings, and many, many happy hours did we spend together whilst they were in progress. Her next greatest pleasure was arranging flowers, and this will explain to you why I care so much for mine. Oh, the ecstasy of that short, brilliant summer ! Dark as the winter was that followed it, I can yet feel thankful to Heaven that I have been allowed to know what intense happiness is. This world cannot be very miserable if many people feel what I felt then, and in the midst of my sorrow I often am comforted by the reflection that the happiness may be felt by many and the suffering only borne by few. I know the general opinion is the other way, and outward circumstances confirm it ; but the longer you live the more you will find that outward circumstances have very little to do with real happiness.

But I must hasten to the conclusion of my tale, for you have been here already longer than you ought. One beautiful day we were all to make an excursion to a fine old castle some miles off, and spend the day there. The party was composed chiefly of young people, and some of them were

inclined to be more frolicsome than was altogether consistent with safety. After dining amongst the ruins, the younger members of the party amused themselves with playing at hide-and-seek, and the old walls soon rung with their laughter. According to our usual custom, Louisa and I had withdrawn from the rest, and were seated under an angle of the building indulging in one of those long, earnest conversations which had daily become more and more necessary to us, when we were mischievously surrounded by some of the young people, who rallied us on our exclusiveness, and insisted that we should take our turn at the game. I was much annoyed at the interruption, and convinced they did not care so much for our company as for the sport of spoiling our quiet half-hour, but Louisa, always unselfish and obliging, immediately arose and joined them. They insisted that she should hide, and that I should stay and be amongst the seekers, and with a merry look at me, as much as to say, "Never mind, we will finish our talk afterwards," she ran away across the green to find a hiding-place. I remember every word of that last conversation, for it *was* the last we ever had together. It was upon the intermediate state of spirits, and a slight difference of opinion had arisen between us: I maintaining that spirits in their separate state were quiescent; she arguing that they knew what took place on earth, and in some instances acted as guardian-angels to those who had been the objects of their affection whilst living in this world.

I delighted to engage in an argument with her,

and generally took the weakest side in order that I might have the pleasure of being vanquished. Our debate had lasted some time, and just before we were interrupted in the manner I have told you, she had said with one of her bright smiles,—

“Well, Philip, I am certain if I die first, I shall watch over you, whatever you may think to the contrary. I never could be so unkind as to leave you all alone.”

She little knew what comfort the remembrance of these last words would bring me, nor how I have rested on them all these years. Well, as I have said, we parted ; and I stood with the merry knot of seekers until the five minutes’ law they agreed to give was over. In the mean time, the sky, which had been clouded for some time, became suddenly more and more overcast, and just as we were about to divide and prosecute the search, a low growl of thunder was heard in the distance. I begged them to stop and give up the game, but with the recklessness of youth and high spirits they all declared with one voice that it did not matter, that Louisa was never frightened at anything, that as long as it did not rain, what could a little thunder signify ? that the lightning was only summer lightning, and would render the game more exciting. I, on the contrary, knew that the absence of rain rendered exposure to the storm more dangerous, and, heedless of their entreaties, I rapidly hastened forward in the direction Louisa had taken, for the purpose of bringing her back and taking her to a place of shelter. Another flash, another, and

another. I was thoroughly alarmed ; the lightning was forked and blue, and I trembled to think of her being alone and exposed to it. I called louder and louder. No answer. I shouted at the highest pitch of my voice. Where could she be ? I had no means of knowing ; I had nothing to do but to look and to look again. Why did she not come forth from her hiding-place, and fly to us for companionship ? I thought how strange it was she should like to be alone, for not even the bravest of us can help being overcome with awe in a thunder-storm. I searched the ramparts, the courts, the bowling-green, looked behind every bush, inside every ruined apartment. But all in vain. " Can she have sought shelter in the dungeons underground ? " was the next question that suggested itself to my mind, and a gleam of joy shot through my heart as I considered that all this time she might be quietly waiting until the storm subsided, for now it had begun to pour in torrents. I called some of my companions, and we went into the dungeons and subterranean passages of the castle, but not a trace of her could be found. All the party were now as much alarmed as myself, and, in spite of the pouring storm, not one of them could be induced to seek shelter until Louisa was found. I hurried down a bank outside the castle-walls, where the terraced garden had once been ; here I again called and called in an almost frantic manner. I felt bewildered, and, gazing round distractedly, I saw what I felt sure was a part of Louisa's dress peeping out of a crevice in a large hollow tree.

But it could not be she, or why did she not answer? The jest was carried too far, it was too cruel. I told her so, but I dared not go nearer the tree; a superstitious horror had seized hold of me, and I begged her to come to me if she was there. Not a sound answered my heart-broken appeal; and driven almost to desperation, I walked up to the tree, and went to the other side of it. I cannot think how I survived the sight that there met my view. My own, my treasured, my beloved Louisa had been struck by lightning! Anxious to find a hiding-place unlikely to be guessed by the others, she had walked some distance from the castle, and, seeing a hollow tree, had gone inside it. Though sheltered thus from all seekers who might approach the tree from the castle side, she was exposed on the other side to all the violence of the storm. It was impossible to tell when the dreadful catastrophe had happened; her death had probably been caused by one of the first flashes, or she would certainly have sought safety in flight. But I did not think of all this until long, long afterwards; for, unable to realize the dreadful truth, I sank on the ground insensible as the corpse beside me. I know not what passed afterwards; I never had the courage to inquire. I will not describe to you the agony of Louisa's parents, nor the grief of her brothers and sisters, for my own was so intense, that, for a long time, I was entirely unconscious of what they suffered. I have often reproached myself since for my selfish conduct in not trying to forget my own affliction, that I might in some measure comfort them; for I had

only known and loved her a little while, but they had loved her many years. However, it seemed to me then impossible, and I narrowly escaped poor Basil's fate. Nothing but the most unceasing tenderness and watchfulness saved me. For a long time I was only alive to one idea, that she had gone without wishing me good-bye. If she had only told me what her last wishes were, if she had only spoken to me one word of meeting again, then, I thought, it would have been easier to bear. But, alas for poor human frailty ! it always appears to us that the affliction we have to bear is the most terrible that could befall us. This unthankful spirit was taken away from me, and I was led to see how much heavier my sorrow might have been. Though one in affection, we might not have been one in faith, and then our parting would have been for ever. But when I retrace the many conversations we had together on spiritual subjects, when I recollect the spirit of peace and piety which was so strikingly manifest in every word and action of that kind and gentle being, I can feel no doubt of her happiness ; and when I remember her last words, I am certain that she is still with me and watching over me for good. I never can consider her as dead, and this feeling grew still stronger when I settled here. I pursued the line of action we had so often talked over ; not a plan was altered, for I felt she was still with me. My rooms were arranged with deference to her taste, my flowers are all her favourites, and often when I walk in the garden in the evening, it is with the greatest

difficulty I persuade myself that she is not by my side. Sometimes when I come home from parish work after a long hard day, I feel a wild longing for some one to sympathize in all my trials and difficulties, and then I sit down and write a long, long letter to Louisa, and tell her every care, as if she really could receive it ; and though the letter of course has to be burnt afterwards, this relieves my mind of its heavy load, and I feel again cheerful and resigned. This may seem to you a strange way of gaining comfort, but it is an innocent one. If Louisa were living now on earth she would be old, nearly as old as I am ; but now she is living in heaven, I like to think of her as I saw her that afternoon before she left us, looking as if no care, no grief, could touch her. It was right that such a fair and innocent spirit should be so early taken to its home ; and what am I that I should have expected her to wait for me ? Some souls require a long probation, whilst others are soon ready. And now I can feel that all this has been for my good ; for had she lived I might not have succeeded in fixing my thoughts so firmly and so fully upon the world to come. I had such capabilities for happiness, a little thing gave me such great joy, that perhaps I should have revelled too much in the delights of this life, and have found entire satisfaction in them. But do not fancy I have no happiness now. On the contrary, everything speaks to me of the goodness of our Almighty Father, and such a pure, deep feeling of peace is often given me, that I wonder how I can ever be so ungrateful

as to have a single moment of loneliness or dissatisfaction. Not many years after I had settled here, I lost my parents. They had the blessedness of dying almost at the same time, for my mother only survived my father a week. I and my sister were with them and closed their eyes. Though much attached to them I felt no tumultuous or inconsolable sorrow at their departure. I knew they were gone to rest, and that I should follow when my work was done. They told me before we parted that I had never caused them a moment's uneasiness, and this was my greatest consolation. Oh ! if men only knew how sorrow is alleviated by the knowledge of never having spoken an unkind word to the departed, they would be much more careful than they are to avoid those heedless expressions which are apt to escape at times from the lips of the most affectionate. When our friends are gone, and gone where no word of regret can reach them ; we are apt to pass over in our minds every little difference that occurred between us and them ; and though they, bright and holy spirits as they are, have probably retained no remembrance of earthly annoyances, these bitter recollections prick our souls, and are tenfold exaggerated instead of being diminished by time. Happy are they who have never felt this ; and may you, my dear boy, have nothing to regret in your own conduct when those you love are called away. (Alas ! poor old man ! how little he knew the remorse I had already suffered on account of my capricious conduct to Sophy. Good old people cannot fathom

a tithe of what passes in the minds of precocious young ones. They think they must be so innocent, because they are a few years younger. Alas ! alas !)

When my parents died, my sister was the only near relation belonging to me. I had the comfort and delight of her society for a few years. We could talk together of those we had loved and lost, and in the calm twilight could people our room with the spirits of the past. She had never known Louisa, but she was never tired of hearing me talk about her ; she would sympathize in all my fancies, and take the greatest delight in pondering over the excellences of that angelic character I would describe to her over and over again. We used sometimes to say we had grown old prematurely ; for in truth we imagined that we had done with all the excitements of life, and that we had nothing to do but to go down hill quietly doing our duty. But this was not to be. My sister was taken from me. Do not start ; I have no more fearful scenes to relate to you. She was taken from me, but only to form the happiness of another. Even in this retired place, her excellence was not to bloom unnoticed, and she was sought in marriage by a gentleman of large fortune and amiable disposition. Everything promised happiness to this union ; and though it was a sore trial for me to give her up, I could not let my selfishness stand in the way, notwithstanding the entreaties of my sister to tell her whether I should be lonely and unhappy without her, and her assu-

rances that if I thought such would be the case nothing should induce her to prefer her own happiness to mine. The marriage took place, and I was left alone, and I have been alone ever since. I have lived in this quiet place all these years, and have never felt a wish to go out of it. I have abundance of occupation, and as for society, my memory gives me company enough. Then you know I have my books, and books are the pleasantest society in the world, for you can take them up and lay them down just as you fancy, and you need never let them talk long enough to worry you. If ever I am inclined to brood over my griefs, I go and visit poor Jane, where I took you the first day we became so well acquainted. She thinks I do *her* good, and never knows what a lesson it is to me to watch her wonderful resignation. I often think how strange it will be in the next world, when we know the hidden causes of things, and all the different influences that have led us on in the right way; I often think how the positions of benefactor and benefited will be reversed, and how we shall probably find out that the patient sick and helpless have been greater blessings to their kind, than the restless striving spirits who now do apparently all the work of the world.

The rector stopped, and appeared for a few moments lost in thought. I did not quite approve of his last sentiments, and, afraid that he would go off into a train of moralizing, I tried by a question to recal him to the *story* part of the conversation.

"But what became of your sister?" I asked.

"That I did not intend to speak of," answered he; "for I cannot bear to mention even the indiscretions of the dead; but there is no mystery, and you shall know. Her husband, though amiable and high-minded, was most careless and extravagant in money matters; and having become security for a friend who was as extravagant as himself, the bulk of his large fortune was swallowed up in the liabilities consequent upon this imprudence. He, poor man, did not long survive the wreck of his fortune; but, unable to bear the change in his circumstances, fell into a deplorable melancholy, and died, leaving his wife with a son and daughter. I hastened to them, and begged them to settle here, promising them a peaceful home, and a sure refuge from all pecuniary troubles; but I am sorry to say my offer was not accepted. My sister said that I had many calls upon my resources, and that she could not consent to be a burden upon me; my nephew declared that he was able and willing to work for the family, that he had obtained a situation as clerk in a mercantile house in London, and that he esteemed it an honour and a privilege to be able to help his mother and sister. In all that he said he showed so much good sense and proper feeling, that it was impossible for me to thwart his plans, even had I been so inclined; and I always held the opinion that it is extremely imprudent to interfere in family concerns, especially when all the members

of one family agree in considering a particular line of conduct to be desirable. Should there be a difference of opinion, then another person may be called in as umpire ; but when there is union, it is as well not to disturb it by advising another course. I could not, however, resist proposing that my niece should take up her abode with me, but when I mentioned the subject, Ernest's countenance became so blank, and her mother looked at her with such tearful eyes, that I forbore to press the point, and, in truth, it would have been a pity to separate them. They formed such a perfect family party, and each was so precious to the others. My sister always reminded me of the description of the excellent woman in Proverbs ; she was so active and energetic, and, at the same time, so heavenly-minded. I often wonder whether she is the same now. I have thought sometimes of going to see her, but it is a long journey for an old man, and every day I find it more difficult to move away from this dear spot. It is now five years since they settled in London : they promised faithfully to let me know if they want any assistance ; but though I have made many offers they have all been rejected, and when they write they assure me they are comfortably situated and require nothing. I have taken care, though, that they shall not be entirely free from obligations to me, for at my death they will find a little sum laid by for them ; if they will not have it now, they shall have it then ; so it will not make much dif-

ference. But I have been rambling on about my own concerns," continued the rector, forgetful that I had begged for these particulars, "and forgetting that you ought to be home. Good night; you had better not come in, or we shall get talking again, and when once I begin about certain subjects it is difficult for me to leave off."

And turning away to hide his emotion, the good old man entered his pretty, though lonely dwelling. I had gained my wish, I had heard his story, and what impression had it left upon me? Simply that of wonder—wonder that any human being could sit down so quietly to bear a great sorrow, and to bear it not only for days and weeks, but for months and years. And then to think so much for others, to reproach himself for not concealing his own grief in order to comfort *them*, to find solace and consolation in entering into all the happiness of others—this was a tranquil self-abnegation which astonished me in its way as much as the heavenly patience displayed by Jane. And I thought to myself as I left the rectory and paced slowly home in the calm moonlight, that perhaps his was a more difficult work than hers; for it must be more trying to be resigned when all believe one happy, than when it is evident to every eye how much we suffer. There is a great help to some dispositions in pity and sympathy, and we feel brave bearing ills that are apparent to the world; but when outward prosperity is our lot, and yet there is an aching void within only to be seen by ourselves and Heaven, then who shall say

what hidden sufferings convulse the mind? I thought all this as I left the rector, for I did not half believe what he had said about the happiness and peace given him. I thought he only said it because he considered it right to tack a moral to his tale.

CHAPTER XII.

EVIL COUNSELS.

THE good rector did not forget his promise. In his own firm and beautiful handwriting he copied for me the poem I had so much admired. I have that worn and yellow piece of writing still. In my worst moments, when rage, despair, and every evil passion have ruled over my stormy spirit with unlimited sway, I have never ceased to value that silent mentor, and have often looked at it with a wild longing that I could return once more to those peaceful times, and shape my life according to his counsel. How strange it is, that though we may have slighted the advice, the prayers, the example of those dearest to us, when the least sign of amendment would have filled them with joy and hope, yet when they are gone, and nothing we can do has power to complete their happiness or add to their misery, then, and not till then, we gaze in doting and unavailing fondness upon the least memorial they have left us, and a letter, a flower, or a book is treasured up with an excess of tenderness we never bestowed upon its owner.

I showed those verses to Mary, but she did not care for them as much as I did, though her life came nearer the pattern of excellence therein dis-

played than mine. She said she did not understand the quaint expressions, and that she didn't know what an "enlarged foe" was, and didn't see the good of living on "spare diet," if she could get anything better. I thought her getting very stupid, and mainly attributed it to Miss Clarke's influence; but the fact really was, that she had been so much engaged of late in active duties, that she had little time to sit and dream as of old; and, though much improved in the eyes of our small agricultural world, she had lost the faculty of searching for the hidden meaning of things, except, indeed, with regard to the Scriptures, of which she was a busy and untiring student. I told her of my success, and imparted to her in a general way the rector's history.

"Poor man!" she said, "how dreadful it must have been for him to talk of it; how sorry you must be that you asked him."

"Pooh!" said I, quite annoyed at her not admiring my diplomatic talents, of which I had a very high opinion, "it did him good. What's the use of keeping things to oneself?"

Mary thought for a little while, and then said,—

"It is curious how very like the rector's history is to Miss Clarke's."

"I don't see the slightest resemblance."

"Why, don't you see that they both cared only for one thing, and both were disappointed?"

"Quite true," said I; "but then Miss Clarke might have married that Leonard, or whatever his name was, and the rector could not have married Louisa, because she was struck by lightning."

"I don't see how Miss Clarke could have married Leonard," she said, with the gravest face in the world.

"Why not?" answered I. "Of course she could have kept him to his word; and I'm sure *I* would have done so, if only out of spite, to prevent his marrying the other one."

"Oh, for shame," said Mary. "I did not think you capable of such an idea. What, and make herself miserable by caring for a man who had left off caring for *her*? I cannot understand that; besides, she had lost all faith in his goodness, and when respect goes, of course love goes with it;" and Mary coloured up and grew quite enthusiastic.

"Upon my word, Mary, you are getting worse and worse; of course, when people are in love, they can't help themselves."

"Oh, can't they?" said Mary, quietly; "then I hope *I* shall never be in love."

This is a specimen of the little conversations we used to have; instead of disputing about people and things, as in our very young days, we now took to disputing about sentiments and opinions, Mary always contending for the supremacy of reason and religion over the feelings, and I maintaining that every fancy was meant to be gratified, else why should such fancy be given us? We neither of us knew much of the subjects we discussed, but I fancy Mary was nearer the truth than I was.

Though by degrees I grew tired of the rational and industrious mode of life I was pursuing under the rector's direction, I did not give up my good habits all at once. I got lazy during my evening

application, and no longer looked upon admission to the rector's sanctum as the greatest of all privileges. Now that my intense grief for Sophy's death had been softened by time, I began rather to look back and long for my unemployed and dreaming evenings, when I swung on the gates and thought of nothing at all, but let my imagination wander unchecked through forbidden regions. The rector would look at me with sorrowful eyes, for he began to have an insight into my true character. How kindly and tenderly he would speak to me, and lay before me in the most gentle terms the folly of the course I was pursuing, or rather the folly of pursuing no course at all. But it was all of no use, the novelty and excitement had gone off, and I was busily on the look-out for something new. Oh, how weary I got of the hanging woods and the deep green fields; I could see no beauty in what I knew so well by heart. History and adventures gave me no pleasure now; what was the use of reading so much about things that I should never have the opportunity of doing?

I did not neglect what the rector had said about Jane. I used to go and visit her very often, and bring her some flowers or anything else I thought she would like. She grew very fond of me, and I liked going to a place where I was always sure of being first. It has always been a wonder to me how good people loved me as they did; perhaps it is the natural tendency of the human heart to like its opposite; but I used often to remark that people of strange and wayward dispositions are sooner

loved by the excellent of the earth than others more like themselves. As for me, I never found any difficulty in making a favourable impression where I wished to do so. In that little cottage by the muddy lane I was much valued, and the rector, ignorant of the self-esteem which always prompted me to go where I was sure of being well received, would say to me,—

“Upon my word, John, I think, after all, you have more heart than brains.”

I felt very angry at this observation, for I had the greatest objection to being thought good-natured, and decidedly preferred brains to heart. What always provoked me most with regard to George was, that everybody who talked about him spoke more of his moral worth than his mental excellence.

“Pshaw!” thought I, “any fool can be good-natured; donkeys are good-natured, poor silly sheep are good-natured; better be hurtful and vicious than merely harmless.”

Though all these thoughts were continually passing through my mind, I still took a positive pleasure in visiting Jane, the most harmless of human beings. She reminded me of Sophy, and her patience in bearing her last illness; and I used to tell her all about my sister, whom she had never seen; and her sweet pale countenance would light up with interest when I described her many doings and sayings, and she would often thank me for telling her about such a bright example.

“It must make you very happy,” she said to me

once, "to have the knowledge that such a kind, good being is awaiting you in heaven."

"No, it does not," I answered, half sobbing; "for it will be so difficult to get to her."

"It is difficult," she replied, "but you know who has promised to help us. Thanks to Him, we have little to *do*; we have only to follow in the path He points out to us. When I was your age, I used to have visions, great and glorious visions of usefulness. I had set my heart upon working for God, and doing a great deal to help the cause of religion. I did not care for human praise, and had no ambition to be known amongst men, but the mere idea of working was delightful to me, and I thought that, perhaps, the angels would look on and say, 'See how zealous she is for the Lord!' I used to read a great deal about all the suffering and sorrow that goes on in the world, and I longed, oh, how I longed, to help those that suffer, little knowing that I was so soon to be one of them. I thought it almost a sin to be so happy and strong when such multitudes were pining in misery and sickness, and a tumultuous longing took possession of my heart, a longing to cast in my lot with theirs, and, if I could not ameliorate their condition, at any rate to share it. This was granted me, but in a way I neither wished nor hoped for. I was seized with a terrible complaint, and from being one of the strongest of human creatures, became weak and helpless as a child. It was a bitter disappointment to me at first, for all my cherished hopes and plans of course fell to the ground. Added to this

was the trial of poverty, for a long list of misfortunes then followed, which would be complicated and uninteresting to you, but which brought us to the position you find us in. I was tempted to murmur against the Almighty, for I had nothing to look forward to but pain and sorrow all the rest of my lifetime. But thanks be to Him, the sorrow was taken away, though the pain remained. One night I dreamt* I was walking along a very narrow road, it was flinty and hard, and I thought I never should get to the end of it. In the distance I could see a great palace brilliantly lighted up, and my heart grew happier as I got nearer and nearer to it. I entered, and found myself in an enormous hall amongst a great crowd of people. At one end of the hall was a large table, and at the table sat one of majestic form and features, who seemed to be carefully examining the work that each of the crowd brought to him in turn. I, too, mingled with those who were pressing up to this bright and beautiful being, but, alas ! I had no work. I felt uncertain of the reception I might meet with, but there was something so kind and gentle in his face that it reassured me, and as I came close up to him he turned to me, and said, 'Do you wish to work for God?' 'Nothing would be so beautiful, nothing so glorious,' I replied, enthusiastically. 'Then go and lie down there,' was the reply. I looked in the direction pointed out. The other end of the hall was in deep shadow, and as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, I saw

* A fact.

several people lying down upon narrow beds. An expression of deep pain was on their features, but they were perfectly still and resigned. One bed was empty, and my name was written over it. I felt that moment as if I would rather do anything than what I was told, but I knew I must, and so I resigned myself to my fate. As I laid down, a feeling of intense bodily weakness stole over me, but at the same time such deep mental joy ! I cannot describe to you what I felt, it was so extraordinary ; but it did not last long, for I awoke and found myself in my own little room, and in great pain. From that moment I have never felt inclined to murmur, for I look upon that dream as a vision sent to help me. I am quite certain that patience and suffering is the work sent me to do, and when it is done I shall go to rest. It is a great step to be able to find out exactly what God wishes us to do, and perhaps it is happy for those who find it so clearly pointed out to them. I, at any rate, have no trouble in thinking of my future course."

Jane asked me if I, too, saw the meaning of the dream. I said I thought I did, and that it was a good lesson to us all. All the time I did not think it a pleasant one, though ; and inwardly hoped I might have personally no occasion for such comforting revelations. Jane did not tell me all this story in one breath ; it was elicited by little and little in answer to my questions, for she seldom spoke of herself or her sufferings, and, indeed, she could not speak much upon any subject. I always

remarked, though, that when occasion served, she would put in a word about the superiority of the quiet virtues over the restless ones. I thought she had been put up to this by the rector, so it did not take much effect upon me. I think now that he never said anything of the kind, and probably never mentioned my name to her, but it was my way, then, to imagine people were interested about my affairs, and I fancied they plotted together to circumvent my plans. I thought I was of as much importance to other people as I knew I was to myself.

I had left off attending school, as I had no spirits to do anything there after Sophy's death, but now that I had had a little change, I was anxious to return to it. My father said he thought it a great pity that I could not stick to my present mode of life, but as I had been behaving better than usual lately, he made no objection to my request.

There was little joy shown by my schoolmates on my return, for I had never been at the pains to secure the love and approbation of any of them. I had not thought it worth while, and their rough ways and sayings were intolerable to me. They used to laugh at my peculiar tastes, and ridicule my fancy for solitude, and my love of the marvellous, in much the same sort of way as my brothers did, and in return I held their favourite games in aversion. I used to look on in silent contempt whilst football and cricket were at their height, or more often I would altogether absent

myself, and spend the time for recreation in musing by the side of the brook, trying to make an imaginary conversation between the rustling stream and the whispering hazel-bushes above it. Our playground was outside the town, which consisted of one straggling street of gable-ended houses, and two or three lanes branching out from it, so that we had plenty of fresh air and exercise every day, besides the walk to and fro, morning and evening, for those who were only day scholars. I liked the early morning and late evening walk better than anything, because I had the time all to myself, and nobody could interfere with me; I was at liberty to indulge in as many day-dreams as I pleased, and nobody could reproach me for being absent. Fortunately, there was no chance of any one offering to walk home with me, because I was not sufficiently beloved to render the temptation of my society any inducement, and if they had offered, most likely they would have been repulsed. My brothers used at first to come and meet me when they had done their work, but not receiving the cheery welcome they anticipated, they soon left off their sociable custom, and leaned more and more on each other for the affection I had no inclination to give them. As they grew up, I thought them more and more coarse and vulgar; and I have no doubt they thought me more and more disagreeable. "If Sophy had only been alive," I used to say to myself, "she would have put us all to rights." Fool that I was, not to see who could have done so! Not being particularly fond of

learning, and not having a sociable turn of mind, it will perhaps excite wonder that I should have been so anxious to return to my school and my former companions ; but the fact was, I had grown thoroughly tired of everything else. This is all the explanation I can give ; and, in truth, sometimes I did not even know my own reasons for what I did.

The rector was surprised at my resolution, for he thought I had decided entirely to follow his instructions. So I had, but that was six weeks ago. I think the masters at my school were the only persons who were pleased, for they knew I could work when I liked, and they thought that by dint of flogging I might in time reflect credit upon their instructions. The old doctor who was the head of the establishment took no great interest in me, however ; and having been fond of active sports in his younger days, and, moreover, a great stickler for old-fashioned notions, was heard one day emphatically to declare that "a boy who did not like cricket could never come to any good." Another remark of his was also repeated to me, "that John was neither fish nor fowl, he would neither stick well to his work nor his play." I puzzled him very much, for he said he had often sad rascals to deal with, but then he gave them a sound flogging, and they were all the better for it ; whereas he was sure I ought to be flogged every day, and then there would be enough mischief left in me for the whole school, and yet he could hardly ever find me guilty of an open offence. He seemed always anxious to chastise me ; his rea-

son was that I "looked as if I wanted it." Knowing his peculiarity in this respect, I was more cautious than usual, and took particular pains to thwart him by not laying myself open to punishment. He was a kind old man though in the main, and I believe much better-hearted than either himself or others gave him credit for; but his ushers did not consider him a good schoolmaster, for he was less particular about learning than anything else, and his favourites were generally open-hearted, good-humoured, stupid boys, who knew much more about batting and bowling than about syntax and prosody. His greatest delight was to get all his scholars out into a large field, and set them to leaping, wrestling, racing, chevy-chase, and all such riotous games, to "brush the cobwebs out of their brains," as he said. He maintained that no education was complete, unless the body had undergone as much training and exercise as the mind; and would often remonstrate with me when he saw me sitting alone busily engaged with some volume of travels, or still oftener with my own thoughts. He said,—

"You will get so morbid and self-important soon, John, that there will be no bearing you; you ought to be well kicked about; everybody needs it in their youth."

I thought him very impertinent, and wondered what business it was of his; as long as I minded my studies, I considered I had a perfect right to employ the hours of recreation as I thought proper. I saw long afterwards, however, that he was right, and if I had thrown off part of the impe-

tuousity of my disposition in the way he recommended, I should have been spared much of the trouble I encountered in later life. About this time my first strong friendship was formed with one of my own age and station, a friendship that had the greatest influence on my character and prospects. A new boy came to our school. His name was Merton Dashwood ; and he was the son of a merchant captain who had left off going to sea, and for some unexplained reason had settled very near our little village. I had never met with any one like Merton ; he was a strange character, very different to the commonplace boys I generally had to associate with. He took everything by fits and starts, just as I did ; he was very clever and very volatile, seemed to care for nothing but amusement and adventure, and looked upon life as a perpetual comedy. Everything was turned into a joke, and I generally was made aware of his approach by a shout of laughter in the distance. Boys care more for amusement than anything else ; and I have always remarked that a person who can cause laughter is welcome wherever he goes, both with boys and men. So it may easily be imagined how popular Merton soon became with teachers and scholars. The breath of applause was very sweet to him, and popularity was his idol. This may sound like vanity, but I believed that with him it was the result of an amiable desire to please. He was attracted by my odd ways and gloomy disposition ; I was drawn towards him by the lightness of his character. We were like sun-

shine and shadow, and before long had struck up a warm and, as we supposed, an everlasting friendship. Who has not known the delights of a first friendship? The comparing of the past lives of both (long lives of fourteen and fifteen years' duration), the glorious anticipations of the future, the disquisitions upon all imaginable topics, the jealousies, the all-absorption in each other's interests,—all these things are most wonderful and most engrossing to the pliant mind of youth. Nothing in after life exceeds in intensity and interest a first friendship, and this is stronger and stronger when the characters are totally different. The fancy Merton and I took to each other was apparent to our schoolfellows, and they never ceased quizzing us about it. We were called all kinds of nicknames; Castor and Pollux, Damon and Pythias, David and Jonathan, assailed our ears whenever we appeared together. Of course I felt furious, and longed to chastise the offenders, but it would not have been easy to fight the whole school single-handed, and Merton laughed as heartily as they did. Nothing put him out of temper, and he used to say to me,—

“Never mind, they will soon leave it off if they see you don't care.”

He did not care, that was very plain; and, heedless of ridicule, would sit and talk with me all playtime, instead of joining the amusements of the rest. The doctor never worried him as he did me about sitting still, and I used to feel it rather hard that he might do as he liked without being ques-

tioned, whilst I had been so lectured. How we talked ! I told him of my dreams of going to sea, of my mysterious uncle, of my reading in the garret, of the rusty pistols, and of all my home troubles, for such I deemed them ; he in return confided to me the particulars of his own and his father's life, and poured into my eager ears all the wild sea stories he had been told by the old sailor and his friends. Some of these were wonderful ; and as I listened with breathless attention I felt convinced that a calling which might bring with it such curious adventures was certainly the life for me. How different to the tame and spiritless existence I had hitherto led : Merton's father had lived, not vegetated. He had seen forty pirates hung in a row one morning before breakfast at Buenos Ayres ; he had been on board a ship where all the crew were laid up with yellow fever, and himself the only person able to move, had carried the doctor on his back all round the vessel to visit his patients ; he had been wrecked, and passed thirty days in an open boat in the middle of the ocean with no provisions save a large potato which also served to stop a hole in the bottom of the boat, though how it could do both was a mystery that often puzzled me ; and I think, now, Merton's imagination added still more extraordinary incidents to the captain's extraordinary tales. I was very happy sitting with him and listening to all these strange stories, and used to envy him his adventurous weather-beaten father, and think how much more interesting he must be than mine. One

day we were talking as usual, and in the course of conversation I said something about Merton's mother.

"Ah! she was my father's English wife; he had several."

"What!" I exclaimed, aghast, "all at the same time?"

"O no!" he said; "one here and the other there. He was captain of a whaler once, and went to Greenland, and then he married a wife there; he could not stay there all his life, of course, and he could not take her back with him, you see, for being used to cold weather, she would have died of heat if she had been brought down here; so it was utterly impossible for him to be so cruel as to take her away from her native land. Then, you see, he took to trading down in South America, and there he married a Spaniard, or a Portuguese, or something of that sort; and he stayed there a long time, and as she was used to hot countries, he said it would never do to take her so far north as England, because she would be sure to die of cold, so he thought she would be much more comfortable where she was. Then, I believe, there were some others, but I forget about them, only I know there was one, an English one, because, of course, he could not be left all alone without anybody to welcome him when he came back to England, and this one was my mother."

"And what are you to be?" I asked.

"A sailor, of course," answered Merton. "I never should be fit for anything else, and I am not

very much fit for that. Oh, Johnny, how pleasant it would be to have nothing to do all day but to laugh, and sing, and bask in the sunshine."

"Yes, when there is any sunshine to bask in," said I; "but look what you are basking in now," pointing to a heap of mud, and other kinds of dirt into which Merton had thrown himself heedlessly, "and look at that cold, grey sky."

"Oh, confound this grimy, dusky, spongy England," he exclaimed, starting up with a jerk that splashed me all over; "oh, for the sunny south, the bright blue skies, and the wondrous rolling ocean, that is the life for a being with a soul, and I can just remember it; yes, Johnny, just remember it, when I was a little tiny hop-o'-my-thumb, I went a voyage somewhen or other to somewhere, *where* I have not the slightest idea, and then I saw, oh! what did I see! open your ears, Johnny, and I will tell you. I saw paroquets, and monkeys, and cocoa-nuts, and palm-trees, and black men."

"They must have been very pretty," I said.

"No, they were not," said he; "they made me scream horribly at first. Well, it was the most extraordinary place I ever could have thought of; I asked my father the other day where it could have been, but he said he hadn't the ghost of an idea where. It's very odd how soon he forgets things."

"Well," I replied, "I should think you must be the son of one of the southern wives, for you seem so fond of hot countries."

"Am I black, Johnny? Am I brown? Have I

woolly hair and a turn-up nose?" exclaimed Merton, shaking his flaxen curls in my face, and looking fiery indignation with his merry blue eyes. "No, I belong to grimy England, and I must make the best of a bad job. But what are *you* going to do, really and truly now? are you to stick at the plough-tail all your life? or are you going to break away from the wholesome restraint of your friends and well-wishers, and fulfil the cherished dreams of your youth? You are a fine fellow; too good to be thrown away on cattle and turnip-fields; you had best follow my example, and we'll plough the ocean deep together."

"I should like it well enough," I said, "but what am I to do? They wont let me go."

"Not let you? who's to hinder? If I were you, I'd run away. *I* would directly, if my father didn't let me do just what I liked, I can tell you."

"I couldn't do that; my conscience wouldn't let me."

"What on earth is the use of talking so much about conscience? Sailors never have any consciences; they do just what comes into their minds. Ask my father about that."

"I daresay; and that's just the reason I am not allowed to be one. *My* father says sailors are scamps."

"You have lived among a very narrow-minded set of people all your days," continued my juvenile mentor; "it's lucky I came to rescue you from your state of bondage. But, now, I've got a plan in my head. If you like to run away, and you

might easily do it some fine moonlight night, I'll give you a letter to a friend of mine at Hull, who is the son of a captain, and he'll find you a berth as cabin-boy in less than no time."

As cabin-boy, indeed! So all my dreams of glory and adventure were to end in this.

"No, thank you," I replied, proudly; "when I go to sea, I'll go as something better than that."

"Go as I shall," said Merton. "I am going to learn navigation in London very soon, and then I shall be a mate after a voyage or two; and then, of course, after that I shall be a captain, some day. You'll get your own way some time or other, if you only keep on worrying; just worry, worry, worry, till everybody is tired of it, and then they'll only be too glad to get rid of you at any price."

"I doubt," said I, "if I shall stick to it when I've got it. I get so uncommonly tired of everything. I wish nothing lasted more than half an hour at a time."

Curious presentiment! and still more curious wish. Could I only have foreseen the years and years of penance I have willingly borne in this dismal spot, how astonished I should have been! But playtime was up, and our conversation could continue no longer, so arm-in-arm, as usual, we proceeded back to the dingy street wherein our old-fashioned grammar-school was situated.

I was walking quietly home in my usual pensive manner, stopping occasionally to switch the ripening blackberries off the hedge with a stick, when Miss Clarke appeared with a basket on her arm,

evidently returning from one of her cottage ministrations. I rather wanted to avoid her, for I was busily turning over in my mind what Merton had said, and felt in no humour to be stopped by anybody. I cannot tell why it was, but at this period of my life, whenever I met Miss Clarke I was sure to be in a bad temper, and when such was the case I took no pains to conceal it, for self-control always looked to me very much like hypocrisy. She, however, was evidently determined to speak to me, and as we met, said, in her peculiarly winning manner,—

“Will you turn and walk home with me? It is getting dark, and I am later than I expected.”

Of course, I had nothing to do but to obey her request, though I felt convinced it was only a pretext for getting an opportunity to give me a lecture about something or other. Nor was I mistaken.

“Johnny,” she said, as I proceeded slowly by her side, “I don’t like this new friend of yours.”

“What new friend?” said I, determined not to understand her.

“You know,” she answered. “Merton Dashwood, of course.”

“How did you know he was a friend of mine?” I asked. “What business has anybody to repeat my affairs to you?”

“Never mind,” she said; “it is not worth being angry about; I happen to know it, and I tell you he is not a good friend for you.”

“Of course not,” I replied, “of course not; he is clever, and original, and fond of fun, and above

all narrow-minded prejudices, and what's more he is attached to me—of course he is not a proper friend for me. I was quite prepared to hear that."

"Now, don't be perverse, Johnny," continued Miss Clarke; "you know these are not the reasons; all your real friends disapprove, or would, if they knew it, disapprove of your intimacy with this Merton. I know more than you do about him, and I tell you he comes of a bad set. His father is an agreeable person, but a man of no principle whatever."

"I know he had a wife in Greenland, and another in South America, and another in England, and some more besides, but——"

Miss Clarke almost screamed, and in her dismay at this revelation let fall her basket and umbrella, and everything the former contained was strewed about the road. As we were busily occupied in collecting the nameless little necessities she carried with her in her charitable visits, I had time to recover my presence of mind, and prepare for the lecture that was coming. Nor was this a light one; for Miss Clarke, though one of the most tender-hearted and gentle of human beings, was by no means sparing of the truth when she considered it necessary to tell it; she always called things by their right names, and would have bearded Henry the Eighth himself, though the axe and the block were in waiting to punish her temerity. Long and earnest was the conversation that followed; she begged me to be careful how I associated intimately with

one whose father was known to be one of the most careless and irreverent men in the world ; she said that she knew Merton himself to be reckless and unsteady, though his easy good-nature and merry heart rendered his society acceptable to almost everybody ; she told me there was no knowing into what mischief this new friendship might lead me, that I might be drawn into evils I had no idea of, that it was better to draw back now than later. I thanked her very much, but told her I had no intention of drawing back at all ; that I considered I was quite old enough to have a friend ; and that I preferred choosing my own, though I was very much obliged to her for the interest she took in me.

"Indeed," I said, "it is too late to go back now, even if I wished it ; for I have promised some half holiday to go and see Merton's home, and make acquaintance with his father."

"This is worse and worse," said my kind, well-meaning friend. "I really think I ought to talk to your father about it, but there is nothing I so much dislike as interfering in family affairs. Johnny," she continued, her voice trembling with emotion, "I used to be very kind to you when you were a very little boy."

"Yes, indeed you were, dear Miss Clarke," said I, warmly. "I never can thank you enough." And recollections of the quiet, happy afternoons at the cottage, the kind words and actions of the hostess, the way she used to gratify every wish that Mary or I expressed, came over me and made me feel

for the moment as if I could have done anything she requested. "You were indeed kind to us, and I shall never forget it."

"Then," she replied, "I am sure you will be kind to me. I will ask you one favour. Promise me gradually to withdraw from this intimacy with young Dashwood, or at any rate not to increase it."

I was very near promising; but then came the question, What right had she to interfere in my affairs? Wasn't it enough to have a father and mother and two brothers, to say nothing of the rector and Mary, all troubling their heads about my concerns and lamenting my waywardness, but I must needs have Miss Clarke also poking and prying into my conduct? It was too bad. But then she did look so kind and gentle, and pressed my hand so warmly.

"Promise," she said again; "never mind about the right or the wrong of it, but promise, just to oblige me."

I was silent for a few seconds, and would in another moment have done all she wished, but unfortunately for the cause she advocated, she continued,—

"I had a conversation with George Weston on this subject. He knows all about these people, and tells me they are by no means desirable acquaintances for any one, much less for one so impulsive and easily led as you."

"Easily led!" I replied. "Easily led! Master George shall find that I am not easily led, at any

rate in this instance. What right has he to comment on my friend? He is out in the world, free from all control, and now he looks back upon me, and wants to give me a kick down the ladder. If ever I meet him again I'll give him a piece of my mind."

"John, I am ashamed of you," said Miss Clarke; "and if you can't remember you are walking with a lady, you had better go home. I did not wish you to walk with me in order that I might listen to your bursts of violence. You ought to be very much obliged to your friends for taking so much interest in you. But I don't wish to be unkind to you," she continued, her kind heart reproaching her even for this little burst of severity; "with your disposition you will have trouble enough during your life; your mind is so undisciplined, it will take a long time and many sorrows, I am afraid, to reduce it to proper order. I only want to help you to try and get it right now, and save you from future trouble, and if you think me meddling, I can't help it; people generally *are* thought meddling if they don't like to see their fellow-creatures going on headlong in a wrong course without lifting a finger to save them. But I want to know why you dislike George; so he has always been kind to you, and would be a very safe friend for you."

"That's just it," I answered; "everybody tells me the same thing, and I am tired of hearing it. George is so steady, George is so good, George is so industrious, George is such a good example, for

ever, and ever, and ever; I hear nothing else, and I am tired to death of it. Now, *I* say, George is so slow, George is so unspiritual, George is so dull, George is so tiresome; but Merton is so venturesome, Merton is so bright, Merton is so daring, Merton is so original, and Merton loves me."

"Or you fancy he does," said Miss Clarke, "which answers your purpose just as well. For my part, before I boasted of any person's love, I should ascertain whether it was worth having. I don't want to say any ill of Merton; I dare say he is extremely good-natured; but I cannot help wishing George were your friend instead. You don't know how good he is; all day long he works hard at Mr. Compass's, and when he comes home there's nothing he won't do; he never thinks of trouble, and never says he's tired."

"All that's nothing to me," I replied, perversely. "I don't live at his home, or at Mr. Compass's, and I don't see how his good conduct at either place can affect me. Now, Merton amuses me all day long when I am with him; he is the funniest fellow you ever saw in your life; can sing, and dance, and act, and never gives me good advice."

I should not have been so obstinate if it had not been for Miss Clarke's mention of George. I was resolved to show myself independent of him.

"I don't want to have a good friend," I continued; "it makes me very uncomfortable to be always looking up to people and wishing I was like them, when I know I can't be anything of the sort,

if I try ever so hard ; I would much rather have one who will excuse my follies, and I'll excuse his. I hate being lectured and scolded ; and as for goodness, after all, it's only the name of the thing. People who are good are proud enough of it, I'm sure, and are wicked enough in the way of self-righteousness."

"You don't know what you are talking about," replied Miss Clarke, "and your present sentiments and expressions convince me more and more that your favourite companion has not done you any good. I fancy now that it is useless to argue with you ; we will continue our conversation when you are in a more manageable state of mind."

"And I will be sure to come and tell you what I think of Merton's father as soon as I have seen him," said I, with an air of bravado ; "I dare say I shall go there on Saturday."

Miss Clarke did not answer. We reached the little white gate that led to her cottage-door. I opened it for her. She turned, and wished me "good night" in her usual kind tone, and then walked up the neatly-gravelled path. I looked after her, half longing to retract what I had said, and promise to do her bidding. But the evil part of my nature had entirely gained the ascendant, and with a sigh, half of remorse and half of relief, I left the little abode of peace and proceeded home.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEA CAPTAIN.

I THOUGHT it a very pleasant thing to be independent. I was much more independent now than I had ever been before, and yet, to my great astonishment, I did not feel happier. I felt pleased to think that no one could hinder me from loving Merton, or Merton from loving me ; and still more pleased to feel that our friendship was entirely voluntary, and not subject to the approbation of anybody. If any one of my family had said, " I wish you to associate with Merton, Merton would be such a nice friend for you," I should immediately have conceived a prejudice against him ; but as the few observations that were made on the subject were of warning or disapprobation, they added a zest to our acquaintance, and gave me that pleasant feeling of self-sacrifice for friendship's sake which has made many an unholy alliance chivalrous and romantic. And yet I did not feel happy, though I was thwarting Miss Clarke to my heart's content. The first thing I did was to tell Merton all she had said, and to stifle the voice of conscience by listening to his praises. Merton was an adept in the art of flattery. Fond of praise himself, he knew exactly how to administer it to

others, and would find out and play upon every person's weak point with a dexterity marvellous in one so young. His off-hand manner and gay laugh prevented any appearance of art being detected, and his frankness and good-humour made people always ready to hear what he had to say. Consequently he had a great influence even over those who were considerably older than himself; and as for his equals and inferiors, they were entirely under his empire. With my jealous disposition it was a wonder I liked him so well; but there was an undefinable charm about him which quite overcame me, and there was also another great reason, I was his favourite. It is very flattering to be particularly loved by one who can pick and choose his friends, and who is acceptable to all. I felt this, and vanity was a very strong tie between me and Merton. Besides, he was disliked by George, and that was enough to make me fond of him. I had never spoken to him of George; but now I resolved to do so, and to find out exactly on what terms they were. So one day, when we were alone together, I began—

“Do you know a lad of the name of George Weston?”

Merton changed colour, and seemed startled by the allusion.

“Who?” he asked. “A youth who is being brought up as a surveyor, or something of that sort?”

I nodded assent, and said that the whole county was wild about him; never was seen such a young saint.

"Oh, ah, I know," said Merton; "he and I fell out some time ago. He took it in his head to lecture me on account of a harmless frolic, which was no business of his, and we have never spoken to each other since. Conceited young prig; I should like to serve him out somehow."

"So should I," I replied; "he is always meddling in my concerns some way or other."

"Indeed," said Merton. "What reason have you to dislike him?"

"Oh, I don't know, I never can think of a reason, that's the odd part of it; but I can't endure him—his face provokes me, and his voice and manner still more. Oh, Merton, don't you think good people are the most wearisome on the face of the earth?"

"I should just think I did," said Merton, yawning; "and what's more, I don't think they are so good after all; it's only pretence with most of them."

This was the curious part of Merton's character. He had lost all faith in human nature, or he never had any faith in it, which is more extraordinary still, considering his youth. I fancy he took ready-made the opinions of his unbelieving father. He continued:—

"But you are an odd fellow, John, for you say you dislike good people, and you are mostly with them. Look at the rector you are always telling me about, look at Miss Clarke, and look at that unfortunate woman who is obliged to lie on her back all day. They are all good, I suppose, or at any rate pretend to be."

"Very true ; but then they don't preach. Miss Clarke is mostly Mary Alton's friend ; she used to have a great influence over me when I was quite a little boy ; but of course as one grows up, one can't mind a woman ; and as for the rector, he is a scholar, and can tell me about a great many things ; besides, his history is a very curious and romantic one, and he has such a kind way with him, one can't help listening to what he says. I have not been with him much of late, though, for there is something in the expression of his face which seems to say, ' I should like to give you a good long lecture, only I am afraid it would be of no use : ' so I always look the other way, now, when I see him coming. And as for poor Jane, poor helpless soul ! she thinks me inclined to be very good, and is always throwing into her discourse little gentle hints about contentment and industry, and so forth, and being happy in that station to which it has pleased God to call us ; but it does me no harm, and if it amuses her, she is very welcome. Besides, it is pleasant to see a face brighten up when I open the door, as Jane's always does, and pleasant to feel I am not going where I am thought a heathen and a reprobate. As for that audacious, meddling George, though, there is something about him I never can get over ; and when he passes me he seems to be mourning over my depravity, and wishing I were as good as himself. I wish to goodness I could get out of his way, and go to sea."

"What's the use of wishing ?" laughed Merton. "Why don't you *do* something towards it, as I have

always told you? Ask your father again; or, if that wont do, persuade the rector it is the only thing good for you, and get *him* to ask. You have no idea what an effect a solemn piece of advice given by an old man in a black coat would have upon such a person as your father. And what's the use of having friends, unless one makes use of them?" Another of the doctrines Merton had learned of his father. I had cause to remember this many years after.

"You're right," I said, "as you always are, kind, clever Merton. When all hope fails, I'll apply to the rector. But, remember, I'm not going to be a drudge; I shall work until I get a ship of my own, and then good-bye to labour and merchandize, and hurrah for buccaneering!"

"You're a strange fellow, John," said Merton. "You'll certainly end by being hanged, or at any rate do something to deserve it. But you know nothing of the world; you had better come and talk to my father—he's the sort of person to give advice to a lad like you. Now, promise me; on the next half-holiday we'll go together."

"That's forbidden, Merton," I replied, with mock gravity; "you are all Philistines, and I shall learn nothing but what is bad from you. You are all amusing, and must therefore be avoided; you are without principle, and therefore I must regard you without interest."

"Will not the prohibition make the action more sweet?" said Merton. "Is there any adventure in doing what all the world approves? O valiant

buccaneer, begin now by defying the opinion of mankind, or you will never have strength of mind to fulfil your glorious career. But, seriously speaking, supposing your friends do object, why should they know anything at all about it? You and I go out for a walk together. Who is to trouble their heads about where we go? I shall begin to feel seriously insulted if you continue to decline making acquaintance with my family. You had better promise, and you will see something there which will bring forth all your hidden treasures of learning, something romantic, something Spanish, something that I have never mentioned to you. It is something living, something beautiful; but you will never guess, and I shall not tell you. You must come and see."

What could it be? My curiosity was roused. I guessed and guessed, but all in vain. I remembered Miss Clarke's kind and pitying look when she wished me good-night at the door of the little cottage, as if she still hoped I should take her warning words to heart, and for a moment I resolved to resist temptation; but then came the thought of George's interference, and I yielded and promised.

I felt that I was wrong in so doing, and yet I could not see any reason against it. I had seen no harm in Merton, and what were his father's former transactions to me? And, suppose he were downright wicked, was I never to come in contact with wicked people? Surely I was old enough to know right from wrong, and strong enough to resist

any temptations that might assail me from that quarter. Besides, an old sea-captain, of coarse and rough manners, could hardly gain any influence over me ; for, though I was only the son of a sturdy yeoman, I had always possessed a refined mind, cultivated to a certain extent, though in a peculiar manner. I would make a study of this old man, as I had already done of many others. I would dissect his character, listen to his stories, but not allow him to gain any influence over me. He was, no doubt, a vulgar old fellow, full of sea terms and sea stories, given to grog and tobacco, and free from any particle of imagination. He was probably the antipodes of my heroic piratic uncle, whose imaginary character still excited all the admiration my enthusiastic nature was capable of, as inferior to him as a merchant is to a warrior, a modern collier to an ancient sea-king. All Merton's refinement and fancy had probably descended to him from his mother ; his father was too rough-handed and red-nosed to have had much influence over a mind singularly versatile and almost femininely perceptive. Such was the picture I had formed in my own mind ; I was much given to draw ideal characters and portraits before I had seen the subjects of them, and I need hardly say was often thoroughly mistaken. So it proved in this instance.

The Saturday following my conversation with Merton, as above related, he and I set forth on a long ramble, as we stated to those who inquired whither we were bound, and on a visit to his home,

as agreed between ourselves. It was a splendid afternoon ; just the kind of day which Mary and I in former years had delighted to spend with Miss Clarke, or which Sophy and I should have spent, when we were quite little children, in rambling about the upland fields, and sitting on the bridge watching the course of the little turbid river that was chattering and murmuring beneath us.

I was in a melancholy mood, and could not resist sighing as I walked by the joyous Merton, who bounded over hedges, stiles, and gates as if the whole world were hardly large enough to contain his wonderful strength and spirits.

"I wish I were like you, Merton," I said. "Though I am still what the world calls a child, I begin to feel wonderfully old. I seem to have exhausted the interest of everything around me."

"Oh, never mind, it will all come back again ; you want more change, more excitement. You think you have nothing to look forward to but a dull long life amongst clodhoppers, and that is the reason you are melancholy. Minds like yours and mine pick the plums out of life's pudding sooner than other people's, and then we want more plums instead of the heavy dough we ought to swallow. You may depend upon it we belong to some other planet—Mercury, for instance—and have got here by mistake. My father will tell you all about that, if we can get him to talk ; but sometimes he takes a silent fit, or pretends to forget everything, and then it's no use trying. I hope we shall find him in a good humour this evening ; he

was pretty well when I left him. He'll be glad to see you ; he's fond of something new, and likes young people ; but he won't let in any of the clergy, or any one like your blessed old rector. He says they're a pack of hypocrites, and he can't bear them."

I was startled by this strong language, and began to think Miss Clarke was right, and that I had got into an entanglement which I should repent of ; but it was too late now to draw back, and I comforted myself by thinking that I would not go again if I found my friend's father to be a character which it was impossible for me to respect. When I look back, how easy it is to trace every thought and feeling from its first germ to its poisonous fruit ; and yet how impossible it was for me to foresee the disastrous consequences they would produce ! I can fancy no punishment for the utterly lost greater than that of writing their own history, aided by a clear memory and a gnawing remorse.

Soon we left the field path, and continued our way along a flat, uninteresting turnpike road, until we reached an ancient cross, which Merton informed me was one of those erected by King Edward to the memory of his wife. It may or may not have been so ; but I always took everything Merton said for granted, though how he obtained his knowledge of history was a mystery to me, as I never saw him read anything but what he was obliged. He used to tell me stories about every hill and glen in and out of our neighbourhood ; and when I asked him if his tales were true, he said, "O yes ;

I found them in an old book of legends." I believe now he invented them in his leisure hours, and that one reason why he preferred my society to that of any one else was, that I was more easily gulled than any other boy of his acquaintance. We left the old moss-grown cross on our right, and after gazing at it for a few minutes turned up a rough stony lane, full of deep ruts—"a road," as Merton said, "after the manner of the olden time,"—and at length arrived at a knot of three or four houses, looking as if they had come down from the neighbouring hill, and were cowering together for warmth. There was a public-house bearing the sign of the "Pig and Whistle;" there was a blacksmith's shop, where the farmers' cart-horses were shod, and occasionally the hard-worked hack belonging to the parish doctor; there were one or two cottages of small account and shabby appearance; and there was one abode which might be called the great house of the village, though anywhere else it would have looked small and mean. It stood a little way back from the road, and was half-buried in laurels. The enclosure was surrounded by a box hedge, and a smart green gate led to the pretentious carriage-drive up which no carriage ever drove. The whole place bore an aspect of "shabby genteel" cockneyism, which jarred upon an eye accustomed to country poverty and country beauty.

"There we live," said Merton. "How do you like it?"

"Not much," I answered, candidly. "It is nei-

ther a cottage nor a farm-house, neither a gentleman's house nor a tradesman's; it ought to be grander or not so grand. I have passed this place sometimes before I knew who lived there, and I never liked the look of it."

"We are not entirely answerable for its defects," said Merton; "it passed through many hands before it came into ours. First an attorney had it, then an agent of some sort, then a retired grocer, then a widow lady, who, people do say, ran away in debt shortly after she came into these parts, and then the wise neighbourhood chose to imagine that a ghost had taken possession of it, and got up some extraordinary story of a murder and a headless woman, which I will relate to you some very dark evening as we walk home from school, and you can believe it if you like, for I don't. My father took the place entirely, I believe, on account of the ghost; he is very partial to the world of spirits, and says it would be a pleasing excitement to him in the monotony of country life."

"If he doesn't like the country, what did he come here for?" said I. "I should have thought a man who had always been accustomed to a stormy life would, at any rate, have settled near some large seaport town, where he would have seen the sea and his dear ships all day. Why did he come into this rural part of the world?"

"If you want to know, you had better ask him," answered Merton, not altogether pleased. "I'm sure I don't know; I never ask questions; and if you ask him, he will probably say he hasn't the

ghost of an idea. I suppose it wasn't convenient to him to remain where he was, that's all."

"Where did you use to live?" I continued, my curiosity always increasing directly an attempt was made to check it.

"Why, at Hull, to be sure," said Merton; "and I only wish we lived there now. I used to lounge on the coast all day, and watch the vessels coming in, and talk to the sailors, and look at the tide as it came roaring up, and build sand forts, and put in black stones for guns, and then batter them down with pebbles. Father never made me do any work then, he was always so busy himself."

"What did he do?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly. Something about cargoes, and I don't know what; but I never troubled my head about it. It was no odds to me."

By this time we had arrived at the smart green gate, which easily opened, as the lock was broken, and one hinge was also gone. The premises wore an air of dilapidation, as if the mind of the owner were occupied with far higher things than the keeping in order of his house and grounds; and it was plain that for years no female hand had been employed in the arrangement of the retired seaman's property. The laurels wanted cutting, the trees wanted thinning, the flower-garden was a flower-garden no longer, and the walks were overgrown with weeds. I could see all this at a glance, and could not help conceiving a prejudice against the possessor. The whole thing reminded

me of a certain passage in one of Watts's "Moral Songs," which I had been compelled to learn in my childhood, and I could not help repeating to myself the beginning of it—

" 'Tis the voice of a sluggard, I heard him complain."

"What's that you're saying?" asked Merton.

"Oh, nothing; only a piece of poetry this garden reminded me of," I replied; and we passed on to the front door, once, no doubt, a smart-looking piece of gentility, but now knockerless and bell-less. A strong smell of tobacco came through the open window, the broken panes of which were stuffed with old newspapers.

"Oh, he's smoking!" said Merton, with an air of satisfaction; "sure to be in a good temper, then; you may come in."

And he pushed the rickety door aside, and entered, beckoning me to follow. We passed into a small room; and there, with one foot out of the window and one foot in, sat Merton's father. He was a good-looking man, of slight figure, and languid appearance, altogether very different to what I had imagined. He looked as if it were impossible to rouse him to exertion, and I could hardly believe that he had ever encountered storms and adventures, or that he had ever been brought up anywhere but in the lap of luxury. He had on a loose dressing-gown of an extravagant pattern, and wore a little red cap on one side of his head, while his feet were encased in large slippers, as if they were put by never to be used again except to carry him from one room to the other.

The room was a curiosity in its way. Its shelves were heaped up with coral, shells, bottles of flying fish, and all kinds of nautical relics ; the furniture was in a most disorderly condition, and there were a few old books of navigation, and a great many pipes, some broken and some whole, lying about in all directions. Over the mantelpiece hung an old rifle, and underneath that were some pistols and a cutlass. Some taste was displayed in the arrangement of these arms ; but this was the only instance in which it was shown. Captain Dashwood had probably just had his afternoon meal, for a plate with fragments of cheese and anchovies stood near him, and he varied the puffs from his long pipe with a sip now and then from a tumbler by his side. All around him bore a most unrefined appearance ; and yet the man himself looked refined. I was much astonished, and probably showed my astonishment, for he turned his deep expressive eyes full upon me, and said, in a very melodious voice—

“ Well, young man, you look surprised. Did you never see a sailor smoking a pipe before ? ”

Merton hastened to explain who I was, and why he had brought me.

“ So, young sir, you wish to be a sailor,” said the captain, who had risen from his chair, and bringing another tumbler, filled it, beckoning me to draw closer, and partake of the hot spirituous beverage he was enjoying. “ Do you know what a hard life it is ? Look at me, how withered and battered I am ; I was once a fresh young man like you ; and now I am a miserable old wreck.”

I looked at him, but could see nothing but a particularly handsome man, so young, too, that I could hardly believe him to be the father of Merton.

"If time deals as gently with me, sir, as it has with you, I shall be very well satisfied."

The captain laughed, as if he were well pleased with the impression he had made upon me, but continued—

"You mistake; my constitution is entirely gone. I can hardly drag one leg after another. I feel completely exhausted when I attempt to walk even across a field. I am fit for nothing but to sit here and smoke."

"After such an adventurous life as yours, sir," I said, "memory must have so many pleasant things stored up to draw upon, that you can hardly want any active occupation. It must be delightful to sit still and sail all your voyages over again in your own mind. I too, should not mind a quiet life, had I ever done anything worth doing; but as it is, it palls upon me sadly."

"Pleasant things to remember?" said the captain, stealing a sly glance at his son, who sat composedly watching the effect of his father's talk upon me. "I am afraid you are very much mistaken there. I began a sea-life before I was fourteen, and the first thing I remember is the severest flogging I could bear without dying outright. Oh, it is a hard life, my boy; you had better think twice before you enter upon it."

If the captain had wished to deter me from

pursuing a sea-life, he went to work the very worst way he possibly could. A little opposition was to my disposition like oil thrown upon flames ; and if my family and friends had cordially entered into my wishes, most likely those wishes would in a few months have died a natural death. I answered as might have been expected :—

“ I am not much afraid of a beating, I have had plenty of that sort of thing at school in past years ; but I don’t want to go to sea directly, I want to learn navigation and be a mate, and then I shall rise and have a ship of my own.”

“ Oh, you’re ambitious, are you, my youngster ?” replied the captain. “ I like to see that. It seldom lasts, though, beyond a few years ; as we grow older we don’t find it so easy to realize our youthful ideas. The world throws a great deal of cold water upon our warm imaginations, and at last, after a deal of kicking and struggling, we lie down quietly, contented if we can only find a place to die in without being kicked by some other miserable being who is trying for the same thing. However, go on, my boy, go on as long as you can ; it is pretty to watch the enthusiasm of the young, though I am long past the feeling myself ; and there is something fresh and invigorating in a youthful imagination, something like a sea-breeze. It does one good, and reminds one of the time when,” and he here dropped his voice and looked silyly out of the corner of his eyes, “ when one was as great a fool oneself.”

What an odd man ! He was a humorist, cer-

tainly. I had come to study him, and lo and behold, he was preparing his mind to study me. There was a kind of fascination about him, which prevented my taking offence at anything he might choose to say ; but I was puzzled at his manner, and half inclined to wish myself away. But he continued :—

“ You don’t smoke, how’s this ? did you never try ? ”

“ No, never, sir,” said I, feeling very much ashamed of my ignorance.

“ You don’t say so ; you must begin directly ; you’ll never be fit for a sailor if you don’t. Here, Mertty, bring a couple of clean pipes out of that cupboard, and let’s make ourselves comfortable.”

No sooner said than done ; but as to *my* being comfortable, that was quite out of the question at first. However, I could not bring myself to face the ridicule of Merton and his father, if I confessed that I would rather pursue the conversation without the aid of tobacco ; so I persevered, and, in spite of various unpleasant feelings, managed to acquit myself creditably. Besides, the discomfort was amply compensated by the sense of manliness and independence my new position gave me, and I cheered my somewhat drooping spirits by thinking how angry George would be, could he see my present employment. Merton rubbed his hands, and looked pleased at seeing such good fellowship ; and his father, excited by the presence of a third person, became more and more chatty and agree-

able. The warm sweet stuff we were drinking, too, was extremely pleasant, and after a few sips I began to feel more lively than I had ever felt before.

They praised me, too, and told me I was a lad of spirit, fit for something far better than an agricultural life; Merton wished I was his brother, and Merton's father said he should be proud of such a son.

The smoke curled up merrily over our heads, more hot water, more sugar, more lemon was called for, and we felt as if we had been relations always.

"You must go to sea," said the captain; "you are bound to go; you would be another Sir Cloudesley Shovel, and he was a fine fellow, though he *did* hang my great-grandfather."

"Hanged your great-grandfather?" said I, "Oh, do tell me about that."

"It is not a long story," replied the captain, "though a very sad one, and shows how the greatest minds may be hard up on a lee-shore when they are obstinately bent on having their own way. You know all about Sir Cloudesley; how he was a cabin-boy, and how by his talents and bravery he rose to the top of his profession."

I nodded assent, for I was well acquainted with the history of our most distinguished naval commanders.

"Well, then, we will skip all that part," continued the captain, "and go on to the last voyage he ever made. He was sailing from St. Malo to

Falmouth or Plymouth, I forget which, with a fine squadron under his command. It was fine weather, and apparently likely to continue so, and with a smooth sea and a stiff breeze, the vessels held their course steadily. The admiral's ship was leading the way, and the admiral himself was walking the deck, thinking, no doubt, of coming honours and advancement. Suddenly my ancestor, who was a clever fellow in his way, though he never rose beyond the rank of a common sailor, interrupted the admiral in his walk and begged to speak with him. It was an awful thing to do, for Sir Cloudeley never liked to be interrupted in anything, and even his own flag-captain was obliged to think twice before he ventured to speak to him when he was walking up and down in that stern way, with his brows knit and his hand upon his sword. He was not an unkind man in general, but was subject to fits of gloomy thought and occasional freaks of ill-humour, which rendered it very uncertain what kind of reception he might give to any person who ventured to break in upon his train of reflection. Whether anything had happened to vex him particularly that morning, or whether he had taken something that had disagreed with him, I know not; but one thing is certain, he was more disagreeable than usual, and more dangerous to approach. My great-grandfather, however, had the presumption to go bolt up to him and say:—

“ ‘Sir, we must alter our course, unless you wish the vessel to go to pieces’

“The admiral looked at him as if he would have annihilated him with a glance.

"'What do you mean, sir? Go back to your duty,' was the only reply he deigned to vouchsafe.

"'Mean, sir?' was the answer; 'I mean what I say, that if we keep her head this way we shall be right upon the Scilly rocks in a few hours, and my duty is to come and tell you of it, which some one else ought to have done long ago.'

"Sir Cloudesley, without saying a word to the unfortunate subject of his displeasure, immediately ordered him to be put in irons for insubordination. In vain the poor man protested that what he said was true, in vain he declared that the whole squadron would be sacrificed if his advice were not followed; Sir Cloudesley chose to treat the matter as an attempt at mutiny, and the result of a drum-head court-martial was, that my ancestor was sentenced to death. The weather was calm enough that evening to allow the boats from each ship to attend the execution. It must have been a grand sight: every ship was hove-to, there was no land in sight, and the setting sun made the distance crimson. The rope was ready to run the unfortunate victim up to the yard-arm, and all the horrid preparations were complete. My great-grandfather stood resigned, but courageous. He turned to the admiral, and said, 'I have a last request to make.'

"'Make it,' was the reply; 'your time is short.'

"'Call the chaplain, and let him read a psalm to me before I die.'

"The request was granted; the chaplain was called. During the interval, who can guess what thoughts passed through the mind of the condemned? And here Dashwood's face lighted

up, and his eyes glowed just as Merton's always did whenever he was telling me some marvellous story.

"Who can guess?" he continued. "Perhaps he thought of the calm green fields of his native parish; perhaps of the latticed window of the little cottage where his mother used to sit and watch for him coming home from his work, before ever a thought of the stormy sea disturbed the peaceful current of his life; perhaps he thought of the quiet churchyard where so many of his friends and relations rested, little dreaming how *his* body would be thrown out upon the boiling, restless ocean, without a prayer and without a blessing. But he had not long to think, for the chaplain came—a peaceful man, without the courage necessary to raise his voice against the hasty execution of a fellow-creature; but though he was cowardly, he was compassionate, and he looked upon the victim with deep and trembling pity. 'What can I do for you?' he said. 'Read, read,' said the other; and taking the Prayer-book out of the chaplain's hand, he turned the leaves rapidly, and pointed to a psalm. Where is a Prayer-book, Merty? Give it me, and I will show your friend the psalm. I can't recollect the number of it."

"There isn't one in the house, father," said Merty, rather to my astonishment, I must confess, though the inmates of this peculiar mansion had so won on my regard in this short time, that I was inclined to view all their habits and inclinations leniently.)

"More shame for you," said the father, with

effrontery ; "you go to school, and not have a Prayer-book !—oh fie !"

"Oh," thought I, quietly, "it's only Merty's carelessness, after all."

"Well," continued the captain, "I have forgotten the number, but I can remember what it's about, and perhaps you know : it's something like this—'Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his days be few, and let another take his office.'"

"Oh yes," said I, "the hundred-and-ninth Psalm."

"Exactly," replied the captain. "Well, all the time the chaplain was reading this, which he did in a trembling voice, the condemned kept his eyes fixed upon Sir Cloudesley, and it was evident to the whole crew that he considered the psalm applicable to the admiral. Sir Cloudesley's face grew blacker and blacker ; but as he had passed his word, he made no interruption, and stood there firm and immovable, bearing the brunt of all the inquiring and wondering glances which were directed towards him.

"The reading was over ; the condemned cried out, 'Remember ! what I have said will prove true !' Sir Cloudesley, enraged, gave the signal ; a loud report was heard, and when the smoke cleared away, a lifeless figure was seen dangling from the yard-arm. The boatswain's whistle sounded, the ship was put before the wind, the whole fleet followed the example of the admiral, and everything returned to its accustomed course. But it did not remain so, for towards night the breeze freshened

and became a gale. The ships were driving wildly at the mercy of the waves, and in the midst of thick darkness the despairing cry was heard, 'Breakers a-head!' The mighty roar of waters breaking over the reef seemed to paralyse the crew, and all discipline forsook them. It was as if the ghost of my ancestor had followed them, crying for vengeance, and doubtless the recollection of the terrible scene of the afternoon helped to deprive them of that courage every English sailor displays in the hour of danger. The flag-ship struck first, and two others followed. I cannot tell you the number of lives lost on that disastrous night, but it was very great, and they were lost, as predicted, on the rocks of Scilly. Accounts vary as to the manner in which Sir Cloudesley met his death. Some say he was drowned soon after his vessel struck, others that he was picked up on the beach by an old woman, a fisherman's wife, and carried to her hut in an exhausted state, and that afterwards she murdered him for his watch and some rings he had managed to save. There was a report once that a man had come over from the Scilly islands with a ring which he brought to Lady Shovel, together with a whole confession of the dreadful deed, taken down from the lips of the old woman when she was dying. However, I doubt this; for I don't think anybody who had done such a villainous thing would be fool enough to tell of it."

I was much interested in the captain's story, but I could not help wondering where he got his information, so I said :—

"If all the crews of all the ships were drowned, how did you know so well what happened the afternoon your ancestor was hanged?"

"Because, you unbelieving youngster," he continued, "one of the crew of the flag-ship was saved after struggling in the water for a long time, and he brought home a full account of everything as it had occurred, and particularly the circumstances of my ancestor's death. He thought it would comfort his poor mother to know all about it."

"But he could not have known what he was thinking about at the last," continued I.

"Of course not," said the captain; "but any fool could guess what he would be likely to think of; besides, that part of the story was all a make-up of my own. Couldn't you see that? You've no imagination, my boy."

I knew this to be quite untrue; my imagination had been a great curse to me all my life, but I did not take offence, as I was exceedingly apt to do. It was only truth that ever made me angry; and I believe this is the case with most people. But I now recollected that Merton had promised to show me something beautiful, something Spanish, if I would come and visit his father. What could it be? Was it a curiosity? Was it an animal? or perhaps it was one of those beautiful illuminated missals that the rector used to talk of to me; for I remember he said once that the monasteries of Spain were particularly rich in such things. Should I ask, or should I wait and see whether they would show it me of their own accord?

Just as I was making up my mind, the door opened, and a ball was flung violently into the room, hitting the captain on the head, and knocking his pipe out of his mouth. Even my good-natured father would have been seriously angry at such an interruption, but the captain did not give vent to even an exclamation of impatience. He turned to me, and said,—

“That’s Beauty.”

“And who may Beauty be?” I inquired.

“You shall see.” And he gave a long whistle, and called “Beauty! Beauty!” as if he were calling a pet dog. The summons was answered by a beautiful boy of about ten years old, apparently, who bounded into the room, and suddenly stopped short in the middle of it on seeing me. I had never seen such a beautiful child. There were many pretty healthy children in the neighbourhood of the farm, but there was nothing peculiar about any of them; they had generally whitish hair, great blue or grey eyes, and cheeks like rosy apples, together with a common, vulgar look, that rendered them quite useless for artistic or imaginative purposes; but here was my ideal of beauty standing right before me, and looking up at me with great wondering black eyes different to anything I had ever seen before.

Well had he been named Beauty. His dark eyes were sparkling with animation; his beautiful waving hair hung over his shoulders, as if no scissors had ever touched it; his mouth had one of the sweetest expressions imaginable; and his com-

plexion was deep and clear olive, and unmistakably Spanish. I could not suppress an exclamation of delight as I gazed at the noble, upright little figure before me.

"There, I told you I would show you something beautiful," said Merton.

"Be quiet, Mertý," said the captain. "Beauty, go and pick up that pipe, fill it again from that leathern bag, and then come and put it into my mouth exactly as it was before."

"No, I sall not," said the child, folding his arms, and standing quite still.

"Oh! you sall not," repeated the captain, rousing himself from his indolent manner; "we shall see;" and taking up a stick that lay near him, he advanced to the resolute little foreigner. Merton here interfered.

"Leave him to me, father," he said, "you don't understand him;" and he went up to "Beauty," who stood like a miniature of one of the ancient heroes I had read of.

"Dear Beauty," said Merton, in his most caressing manner, "dear Beauty, will you pick up that pipe to please me? You know I love you very much, and you know it was wrong to be so rough."

The child stood for a moment deep in thought, and then said, putting his arms round Merton's neck,—

"Yes, Beauty do it for Merton, but not for great rough man."

The captain laughed heartily at the boy's reply,

and eyed him with a rather contemptuous expression, as he picked up the pipe, and stood on tiptoe, trying to replace it in its former position.

"Beauty sorry for knocking it down," he said, with a serious expression of countenance.

I was much interested in this little scene. I admired the disposition of the boy—so difficult to be driven, so easy to be led—I admired the way in which Merton managed him, for Merton's softness of manner had quite won my heart, and at that time I did not know that there is often more real affection hidden behind an abrupt manner than displayed by a caressing one.

I made efforts to attract the child's attention, and succeeded. He was evidently very shy, and unaccustomed to strangers; it seemed that he would rather be silent than talk in the prattling way most children of his age delight in; he opened his large eyes wide, and listened to what I said to him with great interest, but did not seem to have the slightest wish to answer it. I had never seen such a strange being; and when he did speak, his broken English made his talk most quaint and endearing to one who like myself was always on the watch for something new and strange.

"Why are you called Beauty?" I asked.

"Because I am beautiful," he answered, in the most ingenuous manner, which called forth a roar of laughter from us all.

He looked up, not in the least conscious that he had said anything strange.

"Why you laugh?" he said; and his quiet, composed manner made us all laugh again.

"Who told you you were beautiful?" I asked, much amazed.

"Merton told me so," was the unhesitating reply.

"Merton, Merton," said his father, "you really ought not to waste your talents on our sex; you cannot keep your thoughts to yourself, but you must even fill this poor boy's head with nonsense."

But he was evidently much amused all the time, and I laughed heartily at this new proof of my friend's evident determination to be on good terms with all the world. He did not consider even this child beneath the trouble of fascinating. I wished much to hear how this handsome boy had fallen into the hands of my new friends, but could not ask his history in his presence.

"We nicknamed him Beauty some time ago," said the captain, "but his real name is Carlos, which, I suppose you know, is Spanish for Charles; we began to call him Charley, but the English name always puts him in a passion, so for the sake of peace we adopt the nickname, or the Spanish."

Beauty, or Carlos, now seemed to consider that enough had been said about him and his concerns, and began to grow a little curious concerning his unexpected visitor; so he put his hand in mine with an air of grave politeness, and said, quietly, rather as if he were conferring an honour upon me by the question,—

"What your name?"

"John Aylmer," I answered.

"Where you come from?"

"Oakwood Farm."

"Where that?"

"About four miles from here, I think," I answered, highly delighted at getting this interesting boy to talk.

"I go now," he said, making me a grave bow. "Good day." Then turning to me before he went out of the room, he said in a stately manner with a wave of his hand, "Come again." When he was gone, the captain said,—

"Did you ever see such a strange specimen as that? He took leave of you like a Spanish grandee taking leave of an ambassador."

"Perhaps he is a Spanish grandee," I remarked.

"Not unlikely," said the captain, puffing away still more vigorously than before.

"Tell John how you picked him up, father," said Merton. "I am sure he is dying of curiosity."

"Well, you shall have the story," answered his father; "though I declare I have not talked so much for years as you two youngsters have made me talk this afternoon. It was in the year—dear me, what year was it? I haven't the ghost of an idea, I never could remember dates; the only date I ever knew was,

"Sixteen hundred and sixty-six,
London burnt like rotten sticks;"

and that was only because of the rhyme. Well,

never mind when it was ; it was in some year or other I was in command of a vessel trading down south ; if I was to tell you the cargo and all about her, I dare say you wouldn't be a bit the wiser, so that does not matter. We were at war then with France and Spain, so had to wait for the protection of some men-of-war who were to convoy a certain number of merchantmen across the Bay of Biscay and as much further as was required. We waited, in the Downs until all was ready, and then set sail, keeping as near one another as we could. For several days we saw no signs of an enemy's man-of-war or privateer, but one fine morning the signal was made for the whole convoy to close up, and the faster sailers were hove-to, to let the heavier craft get near them. It was foggy in the distance, and I could see nothing at all ; but as the mists cleared off, three or four frigates were discernible, bearing down upon us, and crowding all sail. It was evident they expected a rich booty. Three of them bore French colours, and one of them carried the red and yellow flag of Spain. There was nothing to be done but for our men-of-war each to engage an enemy, and thereby prevent the merchant vessels' capture. Signals were made for us to crowd all sail and escape, and these signals were obeyed by all the convoy. I, however, could not restrain my curiosity, and therefore stood off and on to watch the progress of the fight.

It was not many hours before it was ended, and as far as I could make out, it seemed to be a drawn battle. None of the ships on either side

had struck their colours, and our frigates were evidently too far disabled to take possession of their enemies. And now a curious thing happened. Suddenly the Spanish ship blew up. Whether the powder magazine had been accidentally set fire to, or whether the crew had done it in order to save themselves the humiliation of surrendering, I know not, and nobody ever *will* know, for all on board perished in the flames. We were all startled and horrified at this unexpected event, and hovered about the scene, vainly hoping to pick up some of the sufferers. We dared not go very near for fear of our own ships taking fire, and at last gave up the hope of saving any one from the unfortunate vessel. The contending frigates had by this time hauled off, and as I gave orders to follow our commodore, I saw an object bobbing up and down in the water, that strongly excited my curiosity. It looked like a barrel, and above it appeared what seemed to be the head of a human being. I sent a boat for it, and it was immediately brought on board, when to my astonishment I found a pretty little child securely fastened within it. Round his neck was tied a piece of parchment with these words on it, written in Spanish,—

“‘Save this child, and gain eternal life.’

A few more letters were written on the fragment, but I could not make them out; the writer had evidently begun to sign his name, or to give more particulars concerning the child, when he was interrupted by the destruction of the ship. I kept

the paper in case it might aid the boy some day in tracing his friends. Curiously enough the child seemed to have entirely lost his memory from the shock given him by the blowing up of the ship, and the short and dangerous voyage in the barrel, and I could never find out anything about him, except that his name was Carlos. I was puzzled at first to know what to do with him; sailors are seldom rich, you know; and I never had more shot in the locker than what I required for daily use; but I thought the speculation might turn out well either for this world or the next, so I kept the young fellow with me; and when I got home Merty was so pleased with him, I made him a birthday present of the young shaver, and he can manage him like a lamb, though Beauty gets into a mighty passion with me sometimes."

"Do you ever teach him anything?" I asked.

"Not much, except to light a pipe," said the captain. "Merty does, though, sometimes; when he comes home from school, he pours all his learning, or tries to pour it, into that child's head, and mightily puzzled he gets, I can tell you. Merton has some vision of his returning to Spain, and being restored to the arms of a grandee father or mother, who must be a prince or princess at the very least, and then Merty thinks he shall be loaded with gold and honours, for taking care of the little animal; much better teach him an honest trade, say I; I mean him to be useful about the place soon; black the boots and clean the knives, and do all that sort of thing."

"What ! you're never going to turn that beautiful boy into a servant, are you ?" I cried in horror. "He's a real gentleman, if ever there was one."

"Very true," answered the captain ; "but real gentlemen eat and drink, and you can't eat and drink for nothing. You ought to know that by this time, young man ; but I suppose your father is one of those well-to-do rich farmers who might be gentlemen if they chose, and who need only work just to get an appetite to enjoy their dinner."

"Indeed you're mistaken," I said, not at all ill-pleased at the reputed wealth and consequence of my father ; "my father is rich, certainly, *very* rich, I believe, and the Aylmers have lived at Oakwood, oh, ever so many hundred years ; ever since the lord of the manor got too poor to live there himself ; but he says he is only able to make both ends meet by industry, and that if he was to neglect his business he could soon be as poor as any one. He's rich enough to send us to college, only he says we should get more harm than learning there. He doesn't want us to try to be gentlemen, he says. He likes us best just as we are."

"What a sweet, contented disposition," said the captain, with what I thought was something of a sneer. "How happy it must make you to live in such an atmosphere of rural bliss. What's that the poet says about 'the even tenor of their way ?'"

"I don't know, sir," said I, rather nettled. "I never read much poetry. I can't see why people can't say what they want to say in prose without distracting one's attention by putting it into rhyme."

I used to write poetry myself once, but I got well laughed at, and I never did it again."

This was not quite true, for I alluded to the rector's reproof. He had not laughed at my gift, but only at my way of using it. I, however, was very obstinate, and if I might not use a thing my own way, I would not use it at all, as if such a mode of proceeding ever could hurt any one but myself!

"Quite right," said the captain. "It is an employment only fit for people who have lost the use of their limbs. Do you know what the Spanish proverb says?

*"He who cannot write one verse is an ass;
He who writes two is a fool."*

You may be sure, my boy, that sort of thing doesn't pay; and what's the use of doing anything that doesn't pay? at any rate, as long as we live in this mercenary world."

I was a quick observer, and I remarked that even during this short interview the captain was always abusing this mercenary world, and yet giving vent to the most mercenary sentiments himself. I was surprised at his inconsistency, and forgot I was just as inconsistent in my way. I have not given the whole of our conversation, only just so much of it as relates to my future, for many were the subjects we touched upon, and on every subject the captain seemed to be perfectly at home. He was lively, captivating, dazzling at times, and puzzled me more and more. It was impossible to believe he

had spent all his time in command of a merchant ship amongst rude and uncultivated spirits ; he must have read, for he had always an apt quotation ready, and yet I did not see a single book about, nor even a newspaper. He was much more gentlemanly in his speech than the neighbouring squire and his sons, who sometimes lunched at our house on one of their shooting days ; but then everything around him was so particularly untidy and ungentleman-like, that my mother would have been horrified could she have entered the domain. It was to all appearance the abode of a man who had got tired of life. I was determined to like everything belonging to this oddity, however astonished I might be ; so I put it down to a noble disregard of outward things, and thought he who was dependent on nothing outward for comfort, must have vast resources within his own giant mind. I would certainly cultivate this acquaintance. Here was a new field for conjecture. It would be pleasant to have some new friends ; above all, friends out of the beaten track.

But the captain continued talking in a pleasant, murmuring voice, which was very like Merton's when he was telling me a story. He drew from me an account of my daily occupations, a description of my home, of my father and mother and brothers, and a confession of the deep disgust with which I viewed my present mode of life.

" Your father's a good-natured fellow, isn't he ?" said he, carelessly, as if he had no sort of interest in the answer.

"Yes, very," I said, enthusiastically; "only there are a few little things he always gets angry about if contradicted."

"And what may those be?" said the captain. "I don't ask out of curiosity, for I shall never probably meet your father. He is too busy a man, I believe, to go out of his own beat, and I am too lazy a one. But I have a great interest in studying character, and I have an idea that your father is a peculiar specimen."

"Well," I answered, eager to give every information on the subject, "in the first place, you mustn't say a word against the king or the Church; in the second, you must hate all foreigners; and, in the third, you must think farming the most delightful, the most intellectual, and the most ennobling pursuit in the world—in short, the thing that men were born to do."

"Oh!" said the captain, blowing a cloud, and for a few minutes he seemed lost in thought. No further observation did he make on this subject, but turning suddenly round towards me, he said, "You'll come again and see Beauty, wont you? You might do him good in some ways, and he'll adore you if you give him a few words of Spanish occasionally. I can't talk the gibberish; but if you like it, it'll be good practice for you, particularly if you're going to be a sailor. I am glad to have got acquainted with you, my boy, and think you're a very fine fellow."

This was what I liked; to be called a fine fellow by one so much older than myself, and one, too,

who had seen so much of life. This was something to be proud of.

"Certainly, sir, I'll come," I answered, readily. "I shall be glad enough to talk of something besides farming. If anybody only knew how tired I am of the names of swedes, mangel-wurzel, top-dressing, harrowing, and all the rest of it, they would be very sorry for me."

"Never mind, Johnny; better days will turn up yet," said the captain, shaking me by the hand.

My father always used to tell me that when one's host said, "Will you come again?" it was a civil way of saying, "You'd better be off now;" so, in obedience to this home maxim, I took my leave and my road homewards. As I walked back in the cool evening air, I began to think I had been somewhat imprudent in revealing my home concerns, and also my innermost thoughts, to one who had been till that afternoon a perfect stranger to me; but I put away these suggestions of conscience, and amused myself with day-dreams of what Beauty and I should say and do together. I had weaved a pretty little romance for us both when I reached the church of our village. The vestry door opened, and the good rector came out. He looked tired, but his eyes brightened up behind their spectacles when they saw me, for he had always a merry welcome for the young. It was a saint's day, and evening service was just ended, for the rector was very particular about all ritual observances. He used to say, the form might be there without the spirit, but the spirit would certainly not live long

without the form. I had forgotten all about service; we were only obliged to go on Sundays; and though I could find time to walk with Merton, I could always invent an excuse for not doing what I had no particular fancy for.

"Well, John Aylmer," he exclaimed, heartily, "where have you been all this time? I wanted to talk to you about joining our singers."

"The church singers, do you mean, sir?" I asked.

"Of course; what else should I mean? You have a good voice, John, and it ought to be used for a good purpose. We intend to be very regular in our practisings now, and to meet every Saturday evening at the rectory. Will you join us?"

"I don't know, sir," I replied, hesitatingly; my thoughts still full of Beauty and the captain. "I don't know whether I shall have time, sir."

"Oh, nonsense," replied the rector, "that's the worst excuse you could possibly find. That's what people always say when they don't want to do what is right, but they can always find time to do what they like. What have you been doing with yourself this afternoon, for instance?"

I wondered why he should ask me this question. Could Miss Clarke or George have anything to do with it? I fired up at the idea, and answered,—

"Amusing myself, sir, and walking with my friend, Merton Dashwood." I thought it a great condescension to give an account of myself even so far. Why was I not to have my Saturday half-holidays to myself, without being questioned and worried about them? It was too bad.

The rector's reply came quickly. "Oh, that quite alters the case, of course. I should not wish you to neglect your home duties. Your first duty is to your father and mother. But I tell you what I will do, if you really wish to come. I will speak to Farmer Aylmer, and tell him if he can spare you who have got a voice, I will let him have my servant lad who has no voice, to work for him during the time you are practising with me."

Here was a dilemma! I was caught in my own toils. I was not naturally deceitful, but a want of moral courage prevented me from acknowledging my error. I had nothing to do but to stick to it now. It would never do for the rector to go to my father, for my father would do anything to oblige him,—and I should lose my evenings with Merton. What was I to say? I must invent something else. One little step downwards soon leads to another.

"I don't know that any one can do my business, sir," I said. This was true; they certainly could *not* do the business I was upon.

"But suppose I ask your father," said the rector.

"I'd rather you wouldn't, sir," I replied.

"I'm afraid you've not got the will, John Aylmer."

"I certainly haven't, sir, the will or the power to do this."

"I'm afraid you're beginning to go down the hill," continued the rector. "You never used to refuse a helping hand to any one; though I can't say you ever stuck to your work for long, you were always ready enough to begin."

"That's the mischief of it, sir," I replied. "What's the use of beginning a thing if one does not go on with it? I've begun too many things already and never finished them, and it would be the same story over again with this."

"Pray for the grace of perseverance, John."

"It's no use, sir; it wont come."

"Because you don't really wish for it, I suppose," said the rector, mournfully. "But I wont press you further upon this point; I see you would not be a willing helper, and help given unwillingly never does much good. Good-bye, John, keep a watch over yourself; some day, perhaps, you will think better of it."

"I will come and let you know, sir, when I do," said I, unable to resist the temptation of trying for the last word.

The rector nodded a kindly farewell, and left me, to return to his solitary dwelling. I continued my way, but with no very pleasant thoughts. I had got my own way and had got out of the scrape, but all the time I felt horridly uncomfortable, and for the first time in my life, wished there was no such thing as conscience. It was no use wishing, though; the deed was done. I had told a lie, and had been obliged to tell another to conceal it. I must banish it all from my mind as quickly as possible. I was preoccupied when I entered the farmhouse. My relatives were employed as they usually were in the evening. My father was resting himself after the toils of the day, smoking his long pipe in the chimney-corner. My mother was

laying the knives and forks for supper, pausing every now and then to give a stir to a large pot of something savoury that hung over the fire. Getting the supper ready had always been Sophy's business, and my mother sighed as she fulfilled the little duties that had once been performed by another. How well I knew what that sigh meant. Tom was netting a large net for fruit-trees, and was so intent on his work that he hardly lifted his eyes to notice my entrance. Alfred, as usual, was playing with the cats ; he did not enjoy work for its own sake, and considered the evening as a time for idleness. A little chair was vacant by the fire ; Sophy had always sat there ; and though it was used by no one else, nobody had the heart to move it.

"How wretchedly cold and blue you look, Johnny," said Alfred, making room for me by the fire.

"Do I ? I don't feel cold ; I ran nearly all the way home."

"How you *do* mountebank all over the country," said Tommy. "*I* don't get half the time to amuse myself as you do."

"Perhaps not," said I, rather provoked ; "but then you must please to remember that you like home and work, and that I don't."

"I'm sure it's fortunate somebody does," said my father. "You're at your old tricks again, Johnny ; always discontented."

"I didn't say I was discontented, sir, did I ?"

My father did not answer, but puffed away

quietly. He hated arguing, particularly in the evening.

There was something in the aspect of the family party that jarred on my feelings. And yet how comfortable everything looked ; the cleanly swept hearth, the bright blaze, the scoured stone floor with a piece of matting laid over it near the fire, the sides of bacon hanging from the ceiling, the long board spread with homespun snowy cloth, the little table close to the window with the large Bible on it, which my father always used at family prayers, and my mother would pore over earnestly many a time beside ; could it be possible that I should prefer to all this the disorderly, comfortless, strange abode of my new-made friends ? I hardly dared acknowledge it even to myself, and yet I felt that I did. Where could the charm be ? It must have lain in the novelty of the thing. As I sat down in the chair Alfred moved to the fire for me, I felt I was a wet blanket. I might have entertained them all with an account of my day, but I was not sure if my pursuits would be approved of ; for obvious reasons I could not mention my interview with the rector, and I had a secret feeling that I had better be silent about my new acquaintances.

"Well, what have you been doing ? Can't you tell us some news ?" asked Tom, with the injured air of one who has been busy all day, and has a right to call upon the idle ones for some amusement. "Where have you been ?"

"Oh, nowhere particular."

"What have you been doing?"

"Nothing particular."

"Why, what an entertaining day you must have passed!" exclaimed my brothers, rather provoked.

"Who have you seen?" asked Alfred, making a face at his brother, as much as to say—Now we'll tease him a little.

"Nobody particular."

"Upon my word, Johnny, you are *too* provoking. One would think you had got quite silly."

I was about to make an angry rejoinder, when my mother, always a peacemaker, ended the discussion by saying,—

"Be quiet, boys; can't you see he's tired and hungry? Let us go to supper, and that will put us all in a good humour."

I *was* tired enough, but the tobacco and spirits had effectually taken away my appetite; besides, I was in that disagreeable state of mental excitement which renders eating next to impossible. I felt that the meal would have been pleasanter to all parties if I had not been present at it, and yet I did not possess the power of conquering my evil feelings.

"What's the matter with you, Johnny?" asked one of the party.

Now, if there is one thing more irritating than another to a person in a bad temper, it is to be asked, "What's the matter with you?" I could not for the life of me tell. I should have been very much obliged to anybody who could have answered

that question ; it was just what I wanted to know. So I gave no answer to the officious inquiry.

My father tried to enter into conversation, but none of his topics interested me.

"I bought a new horse to-day, Johnny, at Ashford Fair."

"Oh, indeed, sir !"

"Such a fellow to pull," said Alfred. "A great big, black beast, with a coat like satin. We shall have a splendid team before long."

"Really," I replied, not in the least interested.

"It's very tiresome," said my mother ; "do you know, Johnny, Betsy has given warning ? She's going to be married to that Wat Jenkins."

"That fellow," said Tom, "you gave a thrashing to when you were quite a little boy. You remember the mules, don't you ? You were mighty pleased about that."

But it was all of no use ; I could not bring my mind to anything of the sort ; my thoughts were far away, with Beauty and his strange protector, with Sir Cloudesley Shovel and the man he hanged, with Western Isles and coral rocks, palm-trees, and birds with wonderful plumage ; and when I went to bed, I bitterly moaned over my sad fate. Was it my good angel giving me a last chance that brought the image of the suffering Jane to my mind, and whispered in my ear, just before I went to sleep, "The world is very bright to those who love God" ?

CHAPTER XIV.

WARNINGS.

THINGS went on for some little time very much as usual. I did not see a great deal of Mary, for she was a constant attendant at the parish school, and had risen to the head of it very quickly. She was the tallest and oldest of the girls there, and walked before them all to church. The rector used to complain sadly of the disorderly manner in which the scholars walked down the churchyard on a Sunday, and, on complaining to the schoolmistress, he received this forlorn answer,—

“Indeed, sir, I’ve done everything in my power. I’ve tried everything, from the fear of God to the birch-broom, I’ve threatened them with the judgment-day, and I’ve told them to walk as if they were following a corpse ; but it’s all of no use.”

It is wonderful, however, what one good example will effect ; and the praise of Mary’s behaviour was often sounded by my mother. The schoolmistress no longer complained to the rector, nor the rector to the schoolmistress ; and some of us would go earlier to church on purpose to watch the orderly procession of neat-looking girls come forth from beneath the chestnut-trees that shaded the front of the ancient building (formerly a little barn) that

was used as a school-house. I used to try to catch Mary's eye as she came through the gate, but nothing could take her attention from the duty that lay immediately before her ; and I turned away in displeasure, thinking she was getting far too good to be agreeable. She was only fit for George Weston. George Weston, indeed ! No, he should not gain the victory over me. I had shown myself superior to him once, and I would do so again. I thought Mary already liked me a little bit the best ; and I would soon make her like me a great deal the best. Ours was a very favoured parish : the rector had a private fortune of his own besides what he gained from his living ; his expenses were moderate, and all the rest was spent in charity, and in supporting schools, which were almost the only ones in that neighbourhood ; he had no ambition beyond his work, consequently his work was well done. I did not know how fortunate we were until I left home, and saw what was done, or rather left undone, in other places. If I had only followed Mary's example in taking advantage of all the opportunities set before me, I should never have led the miserable, aimless existence which has bowed me to the earth, and left me without a hope. It was not long before I gave up school. Merton declared he had had education enough, and I thought everything Merton said was right ; so I must needs go away, too. My father consented to my leaving as easily as he had consented to my staying. He was getting thoroughly tired of my vagaries, and, I believe, would at this time

have let me go away to sea, or do anything else I liked. He was giving up all hopes of making me a respectable member of society. But, at present, I was thoroughly engrossed by my new friend. Beauty was the most engaging little fellow I had ever seen, and had taken such a violent fancy to me, that a visit to him was a great satisfaction to my self-love. He taught me Spanish words, I taught him English, and his innocent prattle whiled away many an hour which would otherwise have been spent in gloomy idleness, or in positive mischief. The captain contemplated our friendship with great satisfaction; and Merton, to my astonishment, was not the least jealous. I should have been murderously jealous in his place; and I began to suspect Merton had not very strong feelings. I used to invent all kinds of tales for my little *protégé*, and he looked upon me as an elder brother. He had very magnificent ideas about his birth and parentage.

"Brother," he would say to me, in broken English, "Beauty grow up, and go back to his own country, find his friends, then bring brother to them, and they will give a province and gold to Beauty's dear, dear brother."

Then he would put his arms round my neck, and squeeze it in a most affectionate manner, very different to the grandee ways he showed me on my first visit. But with all my visits I did not get a whit nearer to the captain's reason for living in this out-of-the-way neighbourhood; and if I asked Merton, he turned off the subject, or else said he didn't know.

I fancied there was a change in the manner of some of my friends lately. Miss Clarke always looked grave at me when we met, or I fancied she did; and the rector no longer seemed to enjoy stopping to talk to me in the friendly way he used. I dare say this was partly my fancy; but it had its effect upon my disposition, and did not tend to make me pleasanter in my manner. It was time to probe a little, and try to ascertain whether Mary preferred me or George; for, though we were both too young to marry, it was just as well to find out which of us had the best chance. One fine morning, therefore, when the different members of my family were severally employed in all kinds of useful occupations, I took my hat and stick, and, escaping by the back door to prevent the possibility of being asked to take part in the work of the farm, I trudged quickly along the path that led to Little Dale. I took care to choose a day when Mary would not be at school, and all the way I went along I kept thinking what I should say to her. Perhaps I should find her sitting at the window that looked out towards Oakwood, thinking of me with pensive face; perhaps she would be walking beneath the old Scotch firs that abounded in the field next her dwelling, conning her task for the next day, and, perchance, wellnigh overcome by its difficulty; and then, in the midst of her perplexity, I should suddenly appear, like one of the knights of old, and by my superior mental powers make it all clear to her in an instant. But, alas for romantic

dreams! As I went through the garden gate, who should I see but my idol cutting cabbages! And very pretty she looked, notwithstanding the sublunary nature of her occupation. Her face was shaded by a large garden bonnet. Her mother always told her it was affectation to wear anything of the kind, and that she ought to accustom herself to do the garden work bareheaded; but Mary had little neat ways of her own, and was by no means insensible to her personal advantages. Her plain brown stuff dress was looped up in a manner both picturesque and convenient, and was covered in front by the snowiest of aprons; a large basket was on the ground near her, and she was so interested in her employment, that she had not the least consciousness of my approach. I could not help standing for a few minutes to look at her, there was something so fresh and joyous and comfortable-looking about her. My thoughts wandered back to the first time of our meeting, when she was storming and raging about that same path like a wild beast. What could have wrought such a wonderful change?

“Mary, good morning!”

She started, and looked up.

“Good morning!” she said. “Mother’s gone to market.”

“I didn’t come to see your mother, I came to see you.”

“Oh, indeed! that’s very kind of you; I’m sorry I’m so busy.”

Was this cool greeting all I had to expect?

"Oh, indeed! that's very kind of you; I'm sorry I'm so busy." That meant, I suppose, "You needn't think I'm going to leave off my business to talk to you." I had a great mind to turn back without saying a word more; but I checked my first impulse, and answered,—

"Shall I help you, Mary?"

"Oh, thank you, I shall be very glad. Hold the basket a little nearer, please. Why, how useful you are; you're getting just like George."

I certainly had not come for this, to hold a cabbage basket, and then to be told I was getting just like George; a pretty thing, indeed! But I held the basket as I was bid, and contented myself by saying,—

"Do you like George better than me, Mary?"

"Sometimes," she replied, quietly.

"When?"

"When you are idle and passionate, and he is good and industrious."

"And when do you like me?"

"When you make yourself useful, and are good-tempered."

"And when we are both useful and good-tempered, which do you like the best?"

"Oh, that's impossible for me to say," she replied. "I like you both very much then."

How provoking! she could not go on all our lives liking us both the same, and yet she never seemed to have an idea of anything else.

"But you're growing up, you know, Mary, and you ought to make up your mind; you'll have to

think about being married some of these days, and you can't marry both of us."

"Am I obliged to marry one of you?" asked Mary, laughing. "What if I should choose never to marry at all?"

"Oh, pooh, that's ridiculous," I replied; but I could not have explained why I thought so. Rather puzzled, I turned to another subject. "I say, Mary, do you remember how you stamped about these walks once in a rage?"

"Don't remind me of that," she said, colouring up to the eyes; "I've been ashamed of it for years."

"There's no occasion for that, it was rather fun to see you. You did look so furious, it was quite a sight. I did not like you the less for it."

"Then you ought to," replied Mary. "You know it was very wicked."

"Of course it was," I said; "so is everything one feels inclined to do. I dare say it's very wicked of me standing talking to you here when they're all so busy at the farm."

"Why don't you go and help them, then?"

"Because I prefer staying here."

By this time the cabbages were cut, which they would have been long ago but for our idle conversation, and after carrying in the basket for Mary, I said,—

"Now, then, we can sit down comfortably in the parlour, and have a chat."

"Indeed, we can do nothing of the sort. Do you suppose I could waste a whole morning

in that manner? I've no brothers to do *my* work for me."

"What have you got to do?"

"Oh, thousands of things; I can't tell you how many, but I know if mother doesn't find them all done by the time she comes back, and the dinner ready, too, I shall never hear the last of it."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Peel potatoes."

"Why don't you let the servant do it?"

"She's gone out for a holiday; besides, if she was at home, there'd be plenty for us both to do, I can tell you."

"Bring the potatoes in here and peel them. I like talking here better than in the kitchen, it's a prettier room."

"How particular you are grown, John; you ought to have been a gentleman."

"Of course I ought," I replied; "there was a grand mistake made about that, but it can't be helped now."

"If you didn't mind, John," said Mary, hesitatingly, "I wish— I wish——" here she stopped, and looked rather bewildered.

"Well, what do you wish?" I asked. "Of course I'll do anything for you that I can," I said, with a grand patronizing air.

"I wish, then— I wish— don't be angry—but I wish——"

"Well, what?"

"I wish you'd please to go away."

Here was an unexpected blow!

"Of course, Mary, if you wish it; but I should like to know the reason why," I said, in a dreadfully hurt tone.

"Why, because I have so much to do, and you've hindered me half-an-hour already."

I took up my hat, and with a majestic air prepared to go without taking leave. But poor Mary's kind heart would not allow this, and she called after me,—

"Don't go away, Johnny, without saying good-bye. I didn't mean to affront you, but it isn't my fault that I have so much to do."

"Oh, of course not," I said. "Good morning, miss, I wish you well through your heavy toil."

And without turning my head, I ran down the slippery pathway.

I had gained nothing by the interview; I was in just as much doubt as before. I think this very circumstance made my resolution stronger. Had Mary betrayed a preference for me, I should very likely have cooled in my partiality towards her, but now there was every reason for continuing it. How angry I felt with her all the time, too! How provokingly cool she was! and yet how pretty she looked! Just the sort of being to make one in love with life. There was plenty of time before us; I should one day, perhaps, have a ship of my own; then I would come back and win her, and what chance would a quiet, plodding countryman like George have against a gallant sailor like me?

But it would be a long time before I could raise

myself to such a position, and where was the energy, the perseverance, the tenacity of will required in the process? I could not hide the truth from myself; I knew I was deficient in all these things, and yet this knowledge did not make me more humble. I felt convinced I should get along somehow, and make up for the deficiencies of my character by the small flashes of what I was pleased to denominate genius. I was much disappointed with the result of my visit to Mary, and, as usual, this betrayed itself by the increased surliness of my manner to all with whom I came in contact. I was pacing the garden in no very happy mood, when a well-known figure stopped at the gate, and I heard George Weston's cheerful tones. I did not answer the greeting addressed to me for some seconds, but George was used to this kind of reception from me, and entered without saying another word.

"John, I want to speak to you."

"Speak away," I answered, in my surliest tone.

"It is something particular, something that concerns you; only I'm afraid you won't be pleased."

Of course I knew directly that something disagreeable was coming, and I said so.

"Well," he said, "I came to talk to you about the Dashwoods."

"Oh, I wish to goodness you would let them alone; every one is down upon them just because they happen to be my friends; if they were yours, now, they would be thought perfect saints."

"They would never be my friends under any circumstances," said George.

"Not good enough for you, I suppose?" I inquired, sneeringly.

"No, not good enough," answered George, quietly.

"What a Pharisee you are! I do believe you think nobody good enough to brush your coat."

"You are mistaken; I know several people a great deal too good for anything of the kind; but you are so violent, it is very difficult to talk to you."

"Enough to make one violent, to hear one's best friends abused."

"I did not abuse them, I hardly said a word about them, except that I should not choose to have them for *my* friends."

"And why, pray, Master Sanctimonious?"

"Because I know the younger one to have been concerned in a very disgraceful transaction, and the elder is suspected of being a run-away debtor living under an alias."

"Proofs! proofs!" I cried, in a state of agitation.

"I have no proofs except my word. I knew Merton Dashwood some time ago; he was Merton Parker then. I was on a visit to an uncle at Hull, who keeps a school there, and this Parker was amongst the scholars for a short time; he led a younger boy into wickedness, and then tried to throw all the blame on to him; but notwithstanding its being very cleverly managed, he was disco-

vered and expelled. Take care he doesn't try the same trick upon you. I am not fond of repeating tales, and should not have told you this, had I not known you were so very intimate with these people."

"And by what right, sir, do you presume to meddle in my affairs?"

"The right that every Christian has to stop a brother from going wrong."

"Christian stuff!" said I; "don't think to come over me with cant. How do I know but what you have made up this whole story on purpose to take away from me the little pleasure I have? The only thing I enjoy is talking to Beauty."

"Ah! poor little Beauty," said George; "what a pity he is brought up by such people. He'd much better have gone down in his cask, than run the risk of such a bad education as he is likely to get."

"I suppose it was you who put Miss Clarke up to lecturing me on the same subject?"

"It was," said George. "I thought you would value her advice; but I am sorry to find that you paid no attention to it."

"Of course not. I knew very well who it came from. It would never have entered Miss Clarke's innocent head to suspect any one of evil, if you did not put her up to it; I wonder you, with your industry, can't find some better employment than that of taking away people's characters."

"I have not taken away anybody's character; I merely tell you facts, and you don't choose to

believe them because you do not wish them to be true. That is a kind feeling on your part, but I'm afraid it won't alter the facts themselves."

"I wish you wouldn't talk in that manner," I answered, angrily and hurriedly; "you talk like a book, and I want you to talk like a human being; but you are so cold, I believe you never felt a strong emotion in your life."

George flushed up at this, but he controlled his feelings, and answered, in the same quiet tone that provoked me so much,—

"I don't care what you say about me; you may abuse me in any way you like, if you will only take my advice, and break with these people."

"I shall not do anything of the kind," I answered, passionately. "I am not going to give up my friends at the desire of my enemy."

"Enemy!" said George, shocked and astonished. "You don't mean that; when have I shown myself your enemy?"

I was not quite prepared with an answer, my heart told me I was unreasonable; but having said it I must abide by it.

"Always—everywhere," I replied. "You have been my rival in everything, ever since I was born."

"It has been unintentionally, then," replied George, and his composure was unruffled. "He that ruleth his spirit is stronger than he that taketh a city;" and I felt my adversary had the advantage over me, for the more excited I became, the calmer was his demeanour. This irritated me

the more, for there is nothing so provoking as finding one has no power to ruffle another's temper. I was getting into a downright rage. George, meanwhile, stood as if waiting for me to speak. Seeing that I was resolved not to be the first to renew the dispute, he spoke gently and slowly, though somewhat sorrowfully,—

"Why need we quarrel about it? Will you talk the matter over calmly and quietly, or shall I go away?"

"No," I replied; "let us have it out now we are about it; I have long wished for a quarrel with you, and now I have got the opportunity. Will you fight now? Will you fight?" I exclaimed, throwing off my jacket."

George smiled. "Is that what you call talking it over calmly and quietly? How very different my ideas are to yours."

"Don't laugh at me," I shouted; "I wont stand it. You wont fight? I suppose you intend, then, to go sneaking to my father, and advise him to forbid my going near my friends? It's just what a coward like you *would* do."

"You are mistaken," he answered, coldly; "nothing should induce me to go to work in an underhand manner. You have chosen your own lot, you must abide by it. I shall never interfere again. Good morning," and without saying another word, he quietly walked away.

I was tempted to run after him and insist upon his fighting. I would strike him, I would provoke him, so that he should be obliged to retaliate. But

then the thought came that he was by far the strongest and the most powerful of the two, and that I ought to be thankful he had not accepted my challenge. My mind was too far disordered to give proper weight to this idea; I hardly knew where I was or what I was doing; I rushed madly out of the garden, without any definite purpose, and without seeing where I was going, ran along the lane that led to poor Jane's cottage. It was fortunate no one met me, or I might have been taken up for an escaped lunatic, such a disfigurement is passion. I continued for some time walking wildly in the same direction, until I came within sight of the little cottage where my invalid friend lived. I had not intended to go there, but now I decided I would enter, and calm my agitated mind by conversing with the patient sufferer.

I was in no fit state to pay a visit to one who required tenderness and quiet from all who approached her; but I considered nothing but my own selfish impulses, and knocked loudly at the door, determined, if possible, to give a new turn to my ideas. What fate could have led me there just at that time? There was no answer to my violent knock. Angry at being kept waiting, I knocked again in a thundering manner. In a few seconds the door was gently opened by Jane's mother, who was calm and pale, but had evidently been weeping.

"How's Jane? I've come to see her."

The old woman shook her head, and did not speak.

"How's Jane?" I asked again. "What's the matter with you, my good friend? Can't you speak to me to-day? How's your daughter?"

"Dead, Master Johnny," was the reply.

I could hardly believe my ears. Dead! and I not to have been near her for so long!

"When?" I hurriedly stammered out. "When did it happen?"

"About an hour ago. Will you come in and see her?"

She took my hand and led me in. We passed through the kitchen into the inner room. There lay poor Jane still as marble, but all trace of suffering had disappeared from her features. I had no idea she could have looked so beautiful. I was calmed in an instant, and stood awestruck, gazing on that form which would move no more until the day of judgment.

"She looks happy, does she not?" said the mother, anxiously, trying to find comfort in this thought.

"She *does* look happy," I answered, "and very beautiful also."

"She sent her love to you. She wondered you had not been to see her for so long, and thought things must be going wrong with you, she said. She begged me to tell you not to be ambitious, but always to think of your dying day. There were many other things she said, but I cannot recollect them all now. You must come again some day," and she opened the door for me, to all appearance calm, but her forced composure soon gave way, and

I heard the sound of weeping as I left the cottage. Dead ! Jane was indeed dead, and she must have been dying so peacefully just at the time I was indulging my evil tempers. Suppose I had been taken instead of her ! what would have been my fate ? It was too awful to think of. I was not religious in my heart, but in spite of my wishes the dreadful thought would come that I too must die. Oh, if I could only believe there was no future world ! If I could only be sure that each soul became absorbed in the spirit of the universe instead of retaining its identity ! But I felt this was not the case ; I felt that whatever happened, *I* should be *I* for ever, either for eternal happiness or eternal misery.

I thought of going to the rector or to Miss Clarke, and telling them all my miserable and perplexing thoughts, but my pride stood in the way. I had slighted Miss Clarke's advice once ; and as for the rector, he would be sure to make me do something disagreeable, promise to be a good boy for evermore, or perhaps make me stand up and be catechised with the schoolboys. If I once began trying to be good I must go on, and I did not wish to pledge myself to any line of conduct. I had better go on my own way and see what would come of it ; it would be of no use to try against my fate, and I felt certain my life would be a very odd one. It was in this strain I mused as I proceeded homewards, wondering what I should do when I got there, for my mind was too excited to set to work at any ordinary employ-

ment. I hoped my father would not be about home, for I knew his horror of seeing me idle, and I was sure of getting a reprimand. But if there was any one I wished particularly to avoid, it was my invariable fate to see that very person standing directly in my view, and thus it happened to me. My father was leaning on the farmyard gate, looking at some pigs he had lately bought. I must pass by him to get into the house, unless I went round by the garden, which would look too marked a proceeding. I was agreeably surprised, though, in the greeting I received.

"John, I've had a visitor. What makes you look so scared, though?" he said, interrupting himself.

"Reason enough, sir," I replied. "I've just seen a dead person. Poor Jane, down at the white cottage, is dead."

"Poor thing! happy release for her" (which is always what people say, whether the object of their commiseration wishes to be released or not). "It's a pity you don't attend to the farm-work, John, and then you wouldn't have time to go running about after disagreeable sights."

"But you said you'd had a visitor," said I, anxious to turn the subject.

"Yes, a friend of yours, too, I find. A retired sailor of the name of Dashwood. A fine fellow, he seems to be. Why didn't you tell me about him before?"

Why, indeed? I had a great difficulty in answering this question. I had such an impression

my father would highly disapprove of Dashwood's character that I had always studiously avoided mentioning anything about him or his belongings, and now I was quite thunderstruck at finding they had made acquaintance without my intervention. How very odd of the captain not to mention his intention to me ! And I thought, too, he said he was too lazy to walk anywhere ! And it could not be less than four miles from Oakwood to the rickety mansion I so delighted to visit.

"Well, sir," I answered, "I didn't know you'd like him."

"You might just as well have given me the chance, then. I was passing down the lane on my way from the upper turnip fields, when who should I see but a gentleman leaning over the gate, and says he to me, 'Is this Oakwood Farm ?' 'Yes,' says I, 'of course it is.' Then says he, 'Are you Farmer Aylmer ?' 'Yes,' says I, 'of course I am.' Then says he, 'I know a son of yours ;' and then he told me all about you, and said I ought to be proud of such a sharp son ; which I'm not, you know, because I don't see what good your sharpness does to anybody ; and he says I ought to let you go to sea, for you'd be sure to rise if I was to let you go along with Merton to learn all about it first ; but I told him I hadn't made up my mind about that ; and then I asked him in, and we smoked a pipe together, and drank a glass of ale, and I liked him uncommonly. He has no new-fangled notions, not he ; he stands up for Church and King, and for all the old-fashioned doctrines ; and

he brought such a pretty little boy with him, who kept asking for you; a little boy he called Beauty, and about whom he told me a grand story of a wreck and a fire, and I don't know what all. He's a brave fellow, you may depend upon it; and he speaks so well, and told me my farm was the neatest he had ever set his eyes on."

Oh, here was the secret! This was why the captain had asked me all about my father's peculiarities. It was very strange, for in all my visits he certainly had never given *me* the idea of being such an old-fashioned piece of propriety as my father mistook him for. It struck me very forcibly that the captain adapted his conversation to his company, and that if my father knew as much of him as I did, he would by no means be so pleased with his visit. But I kept this to myself, and fortunately for me my father did not question me further as to my motives for concealing my intimacy in that quarter. It often had happened to me that I had concealed something for a long time, and after all my trouble I found that I need not have done anything of the sort, for that nobody cared particularly about it. It was a curious propensity, and proceeded from a want of moral courage, or perhaps from a natural love of intrigue. I was much pleased with what my father had said about the captain's advice concerning my future line of conduct. "Now," thought I, "I have a chance of being free at last. If I could only get the rector to add his voice to my own, I felt convinced I should have my own way, after all. Then

what about poor Jane's dying words? Pooh! it was all very well for her to talk. She had been shut up in two rooms until she really liked it; but that was no rule for me." I was happier than I had been for a long while, and when I went to bed that night, tossed and tumbled about in a fever of excitement, determined to seek the rector's kind offices the very next day.

CHAPTER XV.

MY OWN WAY.

IT was with a trembling heart and footstep that I entered the precincts of the rectory the next morning. Suppose the rector should refuse to help me, why, then I must trust to the captain alone ; but I knew that my father held the rector in such esteem, that a word from him was likely to have much more weight than a whole host of reasons adduced by other people. And suppose I should succeed in my cherished desires, what then ? Why, I had no very fixed ideas with regard to the future ; if I could only get away from home, and the farm routine, I made sure that I should somehow or other enter upon a career of prosperity, and perhaps not only make my own fortune, but that of all my relations. The rector was at breakfast, but he immediately entered the study, and prepared to give attention to my business.

"Changed your mind about the singing, eh ?" he said in a cheerful tone, as he shook hands with me.

"Not exactly, sir," I said, in an embarrassed tone.

"Why, what then ? nothing wrong at the farm, I hope ?"

"No, sir; but I wanted to talk to you about myself. The fact is," I said, plunging into the subject with a kind of desperation, "that I have been trying for a long time to be good, and it's of no use."

"What do you mean? That being good is of no use, or that your trying is unsuccessful?"

"That it doesn't suit me, sir; that I can't manage it; I ought to have been off long ago; I shall never do any good down here. Now, a friend of mine, Merton Dashwood, is going to learn navigation at a place in London, where an old ship-master teaches about half-a-dozen young men, and I want to go there too. I could easily get a berth afterwards on board some vessel, and I think I should get on as well as other people, if I only had the requisite knowledge."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"To talk to my father, and persuade him to let me go."

"I'll think it over," said the rector. "But will you be steady and persevering in the path you have chosen? It will never do to give up being a bad farmer only to become a bad sailor. But, why not get a berth at once? You might easily pick up nautical knowledge enough on board, I should think."

"I don't want to go as an ignoramus, sir," was my answer. "I hate being laughed at; and I hope with my knowledge and abilities to get on as a mate, after a voyage or two."

"Why not go to some nearer port than London?"

"Because I want to see London, sir; and Merton, too, is going there."

"Oh, very well; then I'll see what I can do for you. I've got a scheme in my head that perhaps may suit you. At any rate, I'll go and talk it over with your father this evening, and before supper time your mind shall be at rest one way or another."

I wished him good morning, and departed, highly pleased at the result of our interview. It was not until I had left the rectory far behind that I recollected I had never said a word to my kind old friend on a subject that would, had it happened a few weeks ago, have been paramount in my mind, namely, Jane's death. How selfish our own plans and interests make us! How astonished the rector must have been at my want of thought! His mind probably was full of the awful event, and yet he had full attention to give to all my petty schemes. Well, I supposed it was the difference between youth and old age, and that I should feel the same when I had attained the same number of years. How little I knew what a long course of daily discipline is needed before the mind can so calmly set aside its own absorbing ideas, and devote itself unreservedly to the interruption, of others. Even now, though I felt almost frightened at what I had done, I should have to leave Mary, and perhaps George would gain a lasting place in her affections during my absence. I should have to

give up Beauty, at any rate for a time, and the dear little creature might entirely forget me. These and many other things I had never half considered, rushed to my mind, and put me into such a state of excitement, it was impossible to go quietly home.

I wandered into the woods, never thinking of the great waste of time in which I was indulging, and all day long amused myself with wild and dreamy speculations—not the best preparation for a youth who was so soon to enter upon a new and active course of life. I do not know how the day passed; I do not recollect anything about my walks, or the outward objects that surrounded me; I was entirely absorbed in reflections, not, I fear, of the most wholesome and elevating kind. It was sunset when I returned to the farm, and my brother Tom, who was looking out of the window, shook his head at me, as much as to say,—

“Wont you catch it now—that’s all?”

But I was too much excited to care, and with a very red face walked into the kitchen, pretending to be quite composed.

“So, Jack,” said my father, who was standing with his back to the fire, “so, I hear you have made up your mind to leave us?”

“That depends upon you, sir,” I answered.

“The rector says that you will never do any good here, and he thinks that an absence from home may teach you to value home comforts more than you do. I think myself that he is right, for you’d better be anything almost than wander about

the country in the unsettled way you do. Really you're hardly any better than a vagabond, and if you don't mind, you'll come to a vagabond's end."

I was burning with curiosity to learn his decision, so I did not interrupt this speech in the undutiful manner I felt inclined to do. My mother listened with a sorrowful expression, but evidently agreed to what my father said.

"Now," said my father, "I'll tell you what I have decided. The rector has some relations in town, to whom he proposes to write and recommend you as a boarder. There is his sister, her son and daughter, and if they accept the offer I shall be satisfied, for I know you will be amongst good people. I wish you to remain there a whole year, studying with the same person who is to teach your friend Merton; and if you stick to one thing for a whole year, I shall have great hopes of your turning out something good at last."

"Am I never to come home, sir, for a whole year?"

"No," said my father. "I wish you to be entirely removed from everything connected with home. You wanted to leave home, and you *shall* leave home. The rector wrote to-day to his sister, and will let me know directly he receives an answer. I hope you will do well in your new way of life, and that I shall have to be proud of you yet. I walked over this afternoon to Captain Dashwood's—(By-the-bye, I never saw such an untidy place in my life. I suppose sailors are never particular; but I *do* think that Merton, or whatever you call

him, might put the place to rights a bit, only he seems almost as lazy a young rascal as *you* are)—Well, I walked over there and told him what I had settled, and he said it was the best plan in the world, as you *would* go, though he sorely lamented with me that you couldn't take to farming, and be content to follow the occupation of your fathers. So now you've got your way, and I hope you'll like it; though if you don't long to be back home in less than three weeks, I'm a Dutchman."

So I had got my way, but not exactly my way either. I thought I should have been at liberty, and free to spend my hours of recreation as I liked, and now I found I was to be under control; for was it not to be under control to have to live under the roof of a strict widow, and moreover a clergyman's sister, to say nothing of her saintly daughter and hard-working son? From what the rector had said about them, I felt certain they would answer this description, and I was almost inclined to repent having left the matter in his hands. But everything was settled now, and I had nothing to do but to thank my father for acceding to my wishes, and promise to try and fulfil my new duties to the best of my power.

"Wont you bring us a lot of fine things when you come home from your first voyage?" said Alfred, grinning at the prospect. And we were soon full of talk about all that I was to see and hear during my voyages, and the treasures I was to bring them.

Before we separated for the night, I ventured to

hint to my father that I should much prefer having lodgings with Merton Dashwood ; but the only answer I received was—

“John, if you don’t like my plans, you can stay at home.”

I had never seen him so decided before, and felt that it was of no use to say another word.

The answer to the rector’s letter soon arrived from his sister, Mrs. Vere. It accepted his proposal with alacrity, but feared the accommodation she could give me would not be worthy of the very liberal payment my father offered. She said she would try to make me as comfortable as possible, and was ready to receive me whenever I liked to come. The other arrangements were soon made, with the help of Captain Dashwood, who was liberal with his advice and assistance. Merton and I were to go up the same day. Merton was miserable at my not sharing his lodgings, and said that the rector’s arrangements had spoiled all his plans. We went out for a walk together, and discussed our future life. We were to see as much of each other as possible, and were to have all sorts of merry doings in the evenings. We swore eternal friendship over and over again, and soon talked ourselves into tearing spirits.

“Recollect,” he said, “you are not to shut yourself up with those stupid relations of the rector ; you’re to come out with me and see life—see life, ha ! ha ! ha !” he cried, shouting with excitement as we jumped over a gate into the next field.

The hedge was so high, that we did not see what

was going on there, and were horrified at finding that we had nearly jumped into the middle of a funeral procession. I knew whose it was directly I saw it. The scarves and the ribbons were white, the mourners were few, and it all wore the appearance of being the last obsequies of one who was poor, but to whom the relations wished to show the greatest respect possible. It was poor Jane who was being carried so quietly up the green hill she had not seen for years. I stood looking on as the procession moved along, unable to tear myself away.

"Come along," said Merton, whose face was very white. "What's the use of stopping looking at a thing like that?"

"No use; but I like to think about it."

"Don't think; it only makes one miserable. I never think."

"I know you don't."

"Come away; let's get out of this melancholy place."

But I turned sharp round upon him. "Merton, where do you think you and I shall go when we die?"

Merton was silent. "I don't want to think about that now. I don't feel as if I should ever die, I feel so well and strong."

"You might be killed by an accident."

"Heaven forbid!" he said, shuddering.

We walked on in silence, neither of us feeling disposed to continue the subject. At last Merton broke in with—

"How stupid you are, Jack! You're dreadfully

given to blue devils lately; just now, too, when you've got all you wanted. Why, you ought to be as happy as possible."

"I don't know how it is," I answered; "though I *have* got my own way, I don't feel at all comfortable. I don't think I ever shall feel comfortable; there's always a something; and if one is pleased with one thing, one isn't with another. Oh, dear me! it's a weary world!"

Merton burst out laughing, and soon began singing one of his comical songs, which made me laugh too, and we became as merry as we were before the lugubrious interruption. I thought myself very fortunate in having such a friend as Merton, who could so quickly chase away all melancholy thoughts.

"I must come and say good-bye to Beauty some time or other," I said, as Merton paused in his ditty.

"Ah, poor Beauty! he's miserable at the thought of your going away. I wish we could take him with us; he'll be precious dull without either of us. I'm so glad father took him to Oakwood that day; I hope he'll make friends with your brothers."

"I don't think he'll be very well amused with them. They're always busy, and haven't a spark of romance in them. They'll set him to work, though, if he'll let them, I've no doubt."

And so chattering away, we re-entered the village.

The shades of evening were closing in, and as we

turned the corner of an old building, half in ruins, which had formerly been the refectory of an ancient abbey, Tom burst out from behind a buttress, where he had been hiding, and with a screech, like that of an owl, startled us from our confabulation.

"How dare you, Tom, startle us in this way?" I exclaimed, for my nerves were from childhood extremely irritable.

"Oh, you two wiseacres! isn't it glorious to have the power of startling such wonderful people as you are! But I came to meet you."

"Humph! Is that what you call meeting us?"

"Yes, of course it is. The rector met me a little while ago, Jack, and he told me to look out for you, and tell you he wanted to speak to you, as he supposes you'll be too busy to-morrow, as it's your last day."

Merton wished me good-bye, Tom ran home, and I proceeded to the rectory. What could the rector want me for? I wondered if it was to scold me for anything! He was right not to delay until the next day, for my kind mother had exerted herself so much as to render any trouble on my part highly unnecessary; so I had arranged to spend that day in making farewell visits to Mary, to Miss Clarke, and to Beauty. Lights were shining in the study-window where I had so often sat, and which I had lately so ungratefully neglected; and all looked just the same as when I resorted there for my quiet hour of study. Those days were ended, and this was the last time I should enter that hos-

pitiable door as one of the young farmers of Oakwood. I was shown into the study, where the rector was sitting with some books before him.

"I wished to see you before you leave our parts altogether," he said. "I wished to see you quietly and alone, so that I might give you these books, and also a few words of advice, which, perhaps, you may think of in after life, though you may disregard them now."

Dear old man! how often have I thought since of those words! and those books, they have been for years my only companions! They are a bible and prayer-book, large, plainly and strongly bound, of clear type, and having my name and his own initials written on the first leaf. I thanked him heartily for his present, and tears came into my eyes as I thought how utterly undeserving I was of all his kindness. I reproached myself bitterly for ever having had one hard thought of him; and felt for a moment the full value of the friend I was going to leave. He talked to me gently and kindly of my duty, and begged me to let the consideration of the everlasting future enter into all my plans, and prevent the undue predominance of any one impulse or passion.

"Don't rush blindly into anything," he said; "consider before you begin a thing, whether it be really worth doing; and then, when you have once decided that it is, let nothing turn you from it. Keep as calm as possible, and remember what is said to all Christians: 'In patience possess ye your souls.' But I will not talk to you more on this

subject ; it is very seldom that advice does any good ; experience is the best teacher, after all. Now, I will ask you to do something for me ; you have it in your power to render me a great service.

I promised heartily to do anything I could.

The rector continued :—

“ You are going to live with my relations, the Veres. Now, I have a suspicion that they are not so well off as they appear to be ; but Ernest Vere has a great share of pride, and this is one of the subjects he is likely to be very touchy about. Were I to write and ask them, the answer I know, would be, that they have all they want, and would beg me not to harass myself with thoughts of them. The best thing for me to do would be to pay them a visit and see myself how things go ; but I am too old and too indolent to take such a journey. However, it will not be difficult for you to find out ; and should you discover that any help would be acceptable, I trust to you to acquaint me with the state of the case. Will you undertake this for me ? ”

“ Certainly, sir,” said I, quite proud at being entrusted with such a delicate commission.

“ After all,” the rector said, “ there may be no occasion ; but still I am not quite comfortable about them, and shall be quite glad of a spy in the camp.”

Then giving me a hearty blessing, we parted, with many feelings of regret and remorse on my part, which were not, however, destined to last long.

The morning of my last day at home broke

beautifully fresh and clear, and the country seemed to look more lovely than it had ever done before, as if it were saying to me, "Look what a heavenly scene you are going to leave. Are you not ashamed of yourself to wish for anything better?" But it was of no use thinking, everything was settled now. I don't know whether I ever should have had the heart to tear myself away if dear little Sophy had been alive; but her death made everything seem different to me. My father was very kind to me, and let me spend my time just as I liked; my mother was much occupied in making arrangements for my future comfort; my brothers were very unhappy at the thought of losing me so soon; though I had not been of much use to them, I believe they found a sort of amusement in watching my odd ways, and in their rough manner they displayed a sort of pitying tenderness which was not much relished by the future buccaneer, merchant-prince, discoverer, &c., (for I hardly knew what I was to be; and had Columbus, Pizarro, Drake, Frobisher, and Whittington, all mixed up together as an example)—"Poor Jack," they said, "was going to seek his fortune, but he never would be so happy as at dear old Oakwood;" and then they each presented me with a keepsake. Thomas's gift being a strong rough-handled knife, and Alfred's (who rather prided himself on his taste), a silver nutmeg-grater, which he had saved up all his money for some time to buy. I was much affected by these proofs of affection, for I knew I was not worthy of them, and expressed myself

more warmly towards my kind-hearted brothers than I had ever done before. I was almost afraid to go and wish Mary good-bye, for I thought I might have offended her beyond forgiveness in our last interview ; but I was determined to go and try to discover whether my approaching departure excited any regret in her mind. As I drew near Little Dale, I got rather nervous, for I knew this was my last chance for some time. I saw her at the gate ; she was evidently going on some errand, but turned back when she saw me and waited my arrival in the garden. I thought this a good sign, she had no intention of avoiding me, at any rate. I ran up the hill in breathless haste, and received a kind greeting in answer to my morning salutation.

"Can you forgive me, Mary," I said, "for being so rude to you at our last meeting?"

"Oh, I had forgotten all about that long ago," was the smiling answer.

"You are very kind, much kinder than I deserve ; so is everybody."

"Everybody would be kind, of course, as you are going away," said Mary, a tear glistening in one of her pretty eyes.

I was enchanted. She must care for me or she would never be so sorry.

"This is my last visit," I said. "I came to wish you good-bye. I am going away for a whole year."

Mary started. "So long as that, all at one time?" she said.

"Yes ; my father thinks it better. He says an-

other move would unsettle me, and he wishes me to try to stick to one thing for a whole year. I shall think of you very often. Will you think of me sometimes?"

"Oh yes," said Mary, "I never forget my friends."

"Are you sure?" I said. "Will not George put me out of your head sometimes?"

Mary blushed. "How can you think of such a thing? George is very good, but he is more my mother's favourite than mine."

Here was an avowal! If I had only known this before, it might have made some difference in my plans. I was emboldened by this confession into saying,—

"Mary, will you write to me sometimes?"

"Why should I? Will not your brothers or your mother tell you about everything?"

"My brothers cannot bear the sight of a pen and ink, and my dear mother never learned to write; my father is always busy, and it would be such a pleasure to have a letter from you now and then, just to break the dulness of my life."

"The dulness of your life? I thought you were going of your own free will. Why, you're never getting tired of it before you've begun, are you?"

I joined in her laugh. My last speech was certainly very like me.

"But you will, Mary, wont you?" I asked again.

"Perhaps," she said, quietly.

"And then, Mary, when I really have made some voyages and some money, then wont we——"

My speech was interrupted by Mrs. Alton, who, not being in one of her fiery humours, invited me into the parlour, and allowed a short interregnum to interrupt the stormy course of her everlasting household work. I was surprised by this condescension, and justly ascribed it to the fact of my approaching absence, for I knew I was no great favourite with the bustling housewife; but, at the same time, I should much have preferred continuing the conversation with Mary in the garden. We were not allowed to have our own way though, and were conducted into the cold, bright, clean room, only used upon state occasions. The floor and the table shone like glass, the chairs were all ranged with their backs to the wall, and the fender and fire-irons were bright as silver. It was not a room for leavetakings; I felt chilled by its aspect, and wished myself out in the sunshine again. Mrs. Alton got out some cake and a bottle of currant wine, and offered me some in a way that she meant to be extremely kind. But my heart was too full to take pleasure in her gifts or her politeness, and it pained me to be obliged to make commonplace observations when I was dying to know what Mary thought of my unfinished sentence, the meaning of which she must have understood. After a constrained quarter of an hour, during which Mrs. Alton poured much good advice into my ears, only half listened to, and enlarged upon the value of industry, energy, and, above all, a due attention to order, neatness, and cleanliness, I prepared to take my leave, inwardly regretting that I should have

no last words with Mary. I was agreeably disappointed. I had hardly gone through the garden gate when she appeared and called me back, holding up a paper I had dropped out of my pocket. It was the paper of Southwell's verses the rector had given me so long ago, and which I always kept with me. I was only too delighted with the opportunity, and eagerly ran back.

"I am so glad I dropped it ; I could not say good-bye to you in that cold-looking room."

"No more could I," said Mary ; "that room always gives me the shivers. Look here, I have something for you," and she thrust a little parcel into my hand. "Don't open it now. Hark ! there is mother calling ; I must go. Good-bye," and with a hearty shake of the hand, she ran back to her daily avocations.

It may easily be imagined that I did not wait long before I opened the parcel. It contained a silk handkerchief, beautifully hemmed, evidently a keepsake from Mary. How I wished I could have thanked her ! I wondered if she would have given it to George had *he* been going away. I did not think she would, still I would have given a good deal to be quite sure of the fact. She was so kind, she would perhaps have given it to anybody. This thought tormented me so much, that I did not find half as much pleasure in the gift as I might have done, but harassed myself with various surmises all the way to the little hamlet where the Dashwoods lived. I knew the captain was at home directly I approached the house, for one foot, as usual, was

sticking out of the window. Beauty ran out to meet me, and said,—

“Come and play with me, captain’s cross to-day.”

But I was in no humour for play, and said so.

“What! Are you cross too?” said Beauty.
“Poor brother, don’t be cross.”

“No, Beauty, not cross, only unhappy. I’m going away to-morrow, and shall not see you for a year.”

Beauty at this began to cry. Poor little fellow, he had few people to be kind to him, and he clung to me as children always will cling to those who have never spoken a harsh word to them. A voice now sounded from the window.

“What’s the matter, you young whipper-snapper? What are you whimpering about now? Come here, Aylmer, and let’s look at you.”

I did as I was requested. I found the captain smoking, as usual, and evidently not in such a good-humour as I had generally seen him in.

“So, you’re off to-morrow; so’s Mertie. Wish you joy. Hope you’ll do well. Have a glass of grog?”

“No, thank you, sir,” I answered, for I thought his sentences rather short, and perceived that something had put him out. I fancied I had better get away as soon as I could, for the captain was one of the very few people I was afraid of. I was not at all pleased with my reception. It was strange that the person who approved of my going should not be half as kind to me as those whose wishes I

had disregarded. I did not stay long, for I remembered what Merton had told me about his strange temper; and as soon as I had taken leave I rejoined Beauty. "Good-bye, Beauty, little brother," I said. Beauty began to cry again, and, holding out something to me, he said,—

"Take this, brother. Merty wanted it, but I would not give it to anybody but you."

It was a gold ring of curious workmanship, very small, and just adapted to Beauty's forefinger, where he always wore it.

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

"I had it on when they picked me up in the cask; I don't remember anything about it before that. Do have it, dear brother, and think of poor Beauty when you look at it."

I refused several times, for I could not bear to take it away from the dear little fellow; but he was so unhappy, I was at last obliged to accept his keepsake, and placed it on my little finger, vowing to wear it all my life. And that promise I have religiously kept; still I wear the precious relic; small as it is, it is nevertheless too large for my now emaciated finger, and yet sometimes it seems to burn me as if it were made of red-hot iron. Such a melancholy expression was on Beauty's face to-day, that I could not help asking him if anything unusual had happened. It was some time before I could get at the truth, but at last I discovered that the poor child had that morning received a flogging for some frolic which had often been committed before, and only laughed at.

"It is not the pain," said poor Beauty, with his eyes full of tears; "but to think of treating *me* like a dog!" and I saw plainly that it was only the ignominy he cared about. "I shall never get over it!"

I was indignant, furious. To think of whipping *my* Beauty! I comforted him as well as I could, and had the satisfaction of leaving him happier than I found him, but I could not get rid of the painful impression this discovery had made upon me, and I was surprised and displeased to find the captain's disposition so different from what it had at first appeared. I soon heard his voice calling Carlos, and so we hastily took leave, promising to love each other always, and to look forward to meeting again. I then turned homewards, intending to call at Miss Clarke's on my way. This was a duty I would willingly have omitted, as I had disregarded her advice; but it would have been highly ungrateful to leave the village without trying to see her. Besides, if she alluded now to my acquaintance with the Dashwoods, I could tell her that it had my father's sanction, and that the captain was popular at Oakwood. This would be rather a triumph for me. But, alas! Miss Clarke was from home on one of her charitable errands, so I lost the opportunity of proving to her she was wrong. I gave a long message to cross-looking Hannah, and went to the churchyard to take a last look at Sophy's grave. I stayed there until it was nearly dark; I thought that perhaps she was looking at me, and that, if so, she would be pleased

to see how much I valued her memory. I remembered she had begged me not to go, but I thought circumstances had changed, and that, could she see everything that had happened since, she would approve. It was an exciting and a fatiguing day, and it was not until I had laid my head on my pillow that I remembered I had promised to visit poor Jane's mother, and hear the account of her last hours. It was too late now, the coach went early, and I must send a message instead. How heartless it seemed !

We were not a merry party at breakfast the next morning ; and, though I had got my own way at last, I felt very much inclined to give it all up, and try to live contentedly at home. I had given Sophy's bird to my mother, who promised never to lose sight of it ; I should have sent it to Mary, but was afraid of being laughed at. At last we were all ready, standing by the mail-road waiting for the coach ; we heard the rumble of the wheels in the distance, and I kept close to my mother, afraid to lose one second I might spend near her. The horn blew, the coach came rattling past us, and pulled up a few paces distant.

"Be a good boy, Jack, and stick to your work," said my father, as we hastened up to it. "Don't forget home, Johnny," said my mother. "And we'll send you such a basket of apples at Christmas," my brothers cried out. I felt very much inclined to cry as I embraced them for the last time, and clambered up to the top.

"Jump up, Polly," said an old man to a young

woman he was helping to the roof ; " it's no odds if you be killed, there's plenty more of the same sort." And, amidst the laugh raised by these words, we clattered along the road ; all the dear inhabitants of home soon appeared but little specks in the distance, and I felt for the first time alone in the world !

END OF VOL. I







